Studies in Language Testing 16

A Modular Approach to Testing English Language Skills

The development of the Certificates in English Language Skills (CELS) examinations

Roger Hawkey

Series Editors
Michael Milanovic
and Cyril Weir

UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE
Local Examinations Syndicate

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

A Modular Approach to Testing English Language Skills

The development of the Certificates in English Language Skills (CELS) examinations

Roger Hawkey

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, UK

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011–4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org

First published 2004

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Times 10/12pt. *System* QuarkXPress®

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 01332 1 hardback
ISBN 0 521 81351 4 paperback

Also in this series:

An investigation into the comparability of two tests of English as a Foreign Language: The Cambridge-TOEFL comparability study
Lyle F. Bachman, F. Davidson, K. Ryan, I.-C. Choi

Test taker characteristics and performance: A structural modeling approach
Antony John Kunnan

Performance testing, cognition and assessment: Selected papers from the 15th Language Testing Research Colloquium, Cambridge and Arnhem
Michael Milanovic, Nick Saville

The development of IELTS: A study of the effect of background knowledge on reading comprehension
Caroline Margaret Clapham

Verbal protocol analysis in language testing research: A handbook
Alison Green

A multilingual glossary of language testing terms
Prepared by ALTE members

Dictionary of language testing
Alan Davies, Annie Brown, Cathie Elder, Kathryn Hill, Tom Lumley, Tim McNamara

Learner strategy use and performance on language tests: A structural equation modelling approach
James Enos Purpura

Fairness and validation in language assessment: Selected papers from the 19th Language Testing Research Colloquium, Orlando, Florida
Antony John Kunnan

Issues in computer-adaptive testing of reading proficiency
Micheline Chalhoub-Deville

Experimenting with uncertainty: Essays in honour of Alan Davies
A. Brown, C. Elder, N. Iwashita, E. Grove, K. Hill, T. Lumley, K. O'Loughlin, T. McNamara

An empirical investigation of the componentiality of L2 reading in English for academic purposes
Cyril Weir

The equivalence of direct and semi-direct speaking tests
Kieran O'Loughlin

A qualitative approach to the validation of oral language tests
Anne Lazaraton

Continuity and Innovation: Revising the Cambridge Proficiency in English Examination 1913–2002
Edited by Cyril Weir and Michael Milanovic

European language testing in a global context
Edited by Cyril Weir and Michael Milanovic

Unpublished

Testing the Spoken English of Young Norwegians: a study of testing validity and the role of 'smallwords' in contributing to pupils' fluency
Angela Hasselgreen

Changing language teaching through language testing: A washback study
Liying Cheng

The Impact of High-Stakes Examinations on Classroom Teaching: A Case Study Using Insights from Testing and Innovation Theory
Dianne Wall

Acknowledgments

This book could not have been completed without the help of many people, in various capacities, to whom I am sincerely grateful.

The first group is of individuals who have been key figures in the international English language tests that are the subject of this book, whom I met to discuss historical and other matters, and who were kind enough to advise me on the relevant parts of my text. In this capacity, I should like to acknowledge, in the order of the relevant chapters in the book, the invaluable contributions of:

- Don Malpass, former Director of the Association of Recognised English Language Schools (ARELS) Examinations Trust
- Bernard Smith, Controller of Examinations for the Oxford-ARELS Examinations in English as a Foreign Language
- Steve Baxter, former Senior Examiner of Oxford EFL exams, and current Chair of Writing for the Cambridge English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Certificates in English Language Skills (CELS) exams
- H A Swan, Principal, Swan School of English, former Chief Examiner for the University of Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations, and Trustee of the ARELS Oral Examinations
- Hazel Orchard, formerly of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) Examinations Board
- Dave Allan, Director of the Norwich Institute for Language Education, member of the original Communicative Use of English as a Foreign Language (CUEFL) Examination Working Group, and former Chief Examiner for CUEFL.

I should also like to acknowledge the contribution of Keith Morrow, Chief examiner for both the CUEFL and Certificates in Communicative Skills in English (CCSE) exams, who was kind enough to read the manuscript of this book and advise on certain points. May I in addition express my gratitude to Alan Davies, Professor (Emeritus), Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, University of Edinburgh, who read parts of the manuscript of the book. My thanks also to Richard West of the University of Manchester,who advised me on the English Speaking Union ELT Examinations Framework Project, and acknowledgements to Joseph McKewan, the creator of the picture panels for the ARELS Higher Certificate exam reprinted in this volume.

I am grateful to the following Cambridge ESOL (then University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES)) staff members for

agreeing to read and offer critical comment as the book progressed: Nick Charge, Subject Manager for the IELTS test, and Subject Officers, Shakeh Manassian and Chris Sinclair.

Finally may I acknowledge the help and advice I received throughout this project from Nick Saville, Director of the Cambridge ESOL Research and Validation Group, from Mike Milanovic, Chief Executive of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, and from the late Peter Hargreaves, former Chief Executive.

Roger Hawkey

Series Editor's note

Over the years, many different organisations in Britain have been involved in the testing and certification of English as a Foreign Language. For a variety of reasons some of these organisations no longer operate. Unfortunately, there is rarely any significant record of what they did or how they did it. This volume was written in order to capture the history of the Oxford-ARELS English examinations and those of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), and to describe how they have impacted on the development of a new Cambridge ESOL examination – Certificates in English Language Skills (CELS). The Oxford-ARELS English examinations and those of the RSA made an important contribution to the testing of English as a Foreign Language in the UK and around the world for a number of years in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Since the 1980s the number of examination boards operating in the context of school examinations in the UK has decreased. This has been for a number of reasons related to government policy, the economics of running examination boards and so on. The University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) has remained as the only university directly involved in school examinations in the UK. Through the 1980s and into the 1990s, UCLES formed strategic alliances with a number of other boards culminating in 1998 with the formation of Oxford, Cambridge, RSA (OCR). The drive to form OCR was a consequence of government legislation in the UK. As these various mergers took place, EFL examinations were sometimes involved but EFL was never the prime driver for any of the mergers. The consequence, however, was that by the late 1990s Cambridge ESOL (or UCLES EFL as it was then known) was in possession of a fairly large number of examinations that did not sit easily together but required significant resources to support. A decision was made to produce a new suite, CELS, which aimed to rationalise the number of examinations offered while attempting to bring together the best features, as far as it could, of the examinations that were to be phased out.

In this volume Roger Hawkey begins by describing the English Language teaching and testing context out of which the Oxford-ARELS and RSA examinations grew. He outlines succinctly a number of trends and evolves a very useful framework for the evaluation of communicative tests that he later applies to his analysis of the various examinations described in more detail in chapters two and three.

Chapters two and three trace in some detail the history of the Oxford-ARELS and RSA examinations respectively. Although the records are sometimes sparse, Hawkey was able gain access to a certain amount of useful documentation. However, what makes this volume so special are the numerous interviews that Hawkey was able to conduct with many of the key people involved in the initial development and subsequent production of these examinations. He draws a fascinating, accurate and sympathetic picture of how the boards operated and how the examinations were conceived and subsequently produced. Hawkey's analysis of the examinations is always fair and certainly helps us fully appreciate the great dedication and commitment of the individuals involved in their development. Each chapter also has extensive appendices that allow readers to get a very clear idea of what these examinations looked like and what was in them. Many readers will, I believe, find this of significant interest.

Chapter four brings us into the present in that it describes in detail the rationale and development of CELS. There is a significant focus on the validation of the new examination focusing in some detail on the validity, reliability, impact and practicality issues that surround examination development. The question paper production process is described and there is some emphasis on the management of change. The Cambridge ESOL approach to examination development gets significant attention and provides the reader with a very detailed understanding of the processes and issues involved.

Chapter five presents the new CELS examination in detail and compares its content to the Certificates in Communicative Skill in English (CCSE), one of the examinations that CELS replaced. There is a comprehensive review of CELS sample materials and specifications.

Roger Hawkey has produced a well written and fascinating history of a number of examinations that no longer exist, as well as a detailed review of CELS, the new examination that replaces them. He brings out clearly the high degree of professionalism that has characterised the British approach to English language testing over the years and illustrates well the quality of the new CELS and the great emphasis that Cambridge ESOL places on all aspects of the examination revision, development, production and validation process.

This volume is the second historical survey in this series, the first being SILT 15, which documented the revision of the Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE). Volumes on the development of business English, academic English and English for young learners are now being prepared.

Michael Milanovic
Cyril Weir
Cambridge
September 2002

Contents

1 The linguistic, language teaching and language testing background

This volume studies four examinations in the English language, all of which figure prominently in the development of a new examination, the Certificates in English Language Skills (CELS), which was first administered in June 2002. The four original exams were the following:

- the (British) Association of Recognised English Language Schools (ARELS) oral examination, which appeared in 1967
- the Oxford Examination in English as a Foreign Language, in reading and writing, first administered in 1978
- the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) Examinations in the Communicative Use of English as a Foreign Language (CUEFL), 1981
- and the successor to the CUEFL exam, the Certificates in Communicative Skills in English (CCSE) exams, 1990.

The ARELS, Oxford, CUEFL and CCSE exams all claim to take full account of the methods and approaches of the second and foreign language teaching of their times. This chapter will thus attempt a historical overview of the language teaching and testing context for the development of these exams, citing mainly the theoretical and applied linguists and language testers of the era. Chapters 2 and 3 will trace the particular evolution of the ARELS, Oxford, CUEFL and CCSE examinations, taking account not only of the theories and methodologies of the times, but also of the "external, non-theoretical, institutional, social forces that, on deeper analysis, often turn out to be much more powerful explanations of actual practice" (Spolsky, 1990: 159). In Chapter 4, the rationale, development and specifications of the new Certificates in English Language Skills (CELS) exam will be presented and analysed. Chapter 5 illustrates the new exam with actual samples of its tests and support materials.

Approaches to language teaching

As all language teachers know, 'movements' in language teaching are rarely exclusive. The principles of new approaches to language teaching are applied in different intensities, with different emphases in different situations. So

much so, in fact, that it is quite normal (e.g. Wilga Rivers 1968) to refer to "the eclectic method" of language teaching, meaning a selection of approaches from different "movements". Howatt (1984: 192) reminds us that language teaching "movements" that we may consider as "discrete" are often actually variations of what he calls the same "underlying philosophy". Howatt would thus see as related some of the language teaching approaches treated in this volume as more independent of each other:

> *These ideas have been known by a variety of labels (Natural Method, Conversation Method, Direct Method, Communicative Approach and so on), and the classroom techniques associated with them have also changed from time to time. But the underlying philosophy has remained constant* (1984: 192).

The term "approach", as used in this chapter, follows Strevens' portmanteau definition (1980:13): that is, a "fully developed 'package deal' of attitudes, principles, perhaps theories, backed by a substantial range of teaching materials and exemplifications of the ideology in practice that inform a particular school of thought in language teaching". From the characterisation of some of the language teaching approaches below, it may emerge that the differences are more significant than Howatt would imply. Be that as it may, the changing influences of both educational and linguistic theories are certainly reflected in language teaching. These influences often came from those categorised by Strevens (1980: 52) as the *descriptivists*, for example Sweet (e.g. 1899/1964), Jespersen (e.g. 1933), Palmer (e.g. 1938), Hornby, (e.g. 1954–56, 1959–66), Quirk *et al.* (1972), all of whom, through their linguistic descriptions, inventories of sounds, lexis, structural patterns, views on language learning and teaching problems, or their English language teaching materials, figured in the approaches summarised below. Further powerful influences on language teaching came of course from the theoretical and applied *linguists*, including the psycholinguists, sociolinguists and discourse analysts referred to below.

Grammar-translation approach

The grammar-translation approach to the teaching of a foreign language is often called the classical approach, influenced as it is by "the formal teaching of Latin and Greek in Europe for many centuries" (Rivers 1968: 14). Given that the method was still applied in the mid-twentieth century to the teaching of non-current languages such as Latin and ancient Greek, its objectives would, it might be assumed, differ from those of the teaching of modern languages. Howatt (1984: 131) explains that the grammar-translation method was originally an attempt to adapt the scholastic study of foreign languages for a reading knowledge of their culture and history "to the circumstances and requirements" of school students. Hence, he suggests, the emphasis on sentence-level usage. Howatt claims that the first grammar-translation course for the teaching of

English was written by Johann Flick, in Germany, in 1793. Yet many modern language-teaching classrooms of the nineteen-fifties bore the typical characteristics of this approach, summarised here in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

The Grammar-translation method

Approach	Objectives	Sample classroom activities	Problems
Grammar-translation	• to inculcate an understanding of the grammar of a language • training in the translation and accurate writing of the language • to provide students with a wide literary vocabulary • to use language-learning as an intellectual discipline	• students learn target language vocabulary lists (with L1 equivalents) from their textbook • teacher (T.) and/or students read textbook passage in target language (TL) aloud • students translate sentence by sentence • T. explains rules of grammatical usage featured in the passage • students copy grammar rules, paradigms examples, exceptions in their notebooks, and can expect their knowledge of the rules to be tested • students do written practice exercises, e.g. filling in blanks in grammatical phrase or sentence-level exercises, or translate into TL specially selected phrases or sentences containing the grammatical usage concerned • students regularly do "proses", i.e. passages for translation to or from the TL	• little interest in TL pronunciation, intonation • TL not generally seen as a means of expressing one's own meanings, in writing or in speaking • thus little communicative activity in the TL

It was a common occurrence for students, even with years of grammar-translation language learning experience, nevertheless to find their first experiences of functioning in real TL-using situations (for example their first visit to France) very fraught, especially in aural-oral communication.

Direct method

Direct methods of language teaching, that is those avoiding the use of the learner's first language in the foreign-language classroom, would appear to contrast more strongly than Howatt suggests with the grammar-translation approach, but (see Hagboldt 1948: 5–9) were already in use by the nineteenth century. Figure 1.2 summarises the main features of the direct method.

Figure 1.2

The direct method

Approach	Objectives	Sample classroom activities	Problems
Direct	• to recreate L1 learning conditions, where understanding comes mainly through listening, speaking through actually speaking • to encourage direct association of TL words and sentences with objects, notions and actions without the mediating use of L1 • to provide practice in aural-oral skills before reading and writing • to facilitate learning of grammar through practice and inference rather than explanation • to ensure learners can function in the TL early, orally and in writing	• T. addresses students in TL and expects them to reply in it • T. talks in TL, about classroom objects, asking questions, giving orders; students obey orders and tell class in TL what they are/ have been doing • T. uses pictures to describe activities and events in TL • T. demonstrates meanings of new action or relational words by miming • students repeat new words and phrases in TL • students asked to form own TL sentences according to what they have heard • students read aloud passage of related content after the teacher, chorally then individually • T. asks questions about passage in TL, students reply in TL • difficulties of vocabulary or structure explained in TL • students make TL notes • students write in TL, mainly on what has been covered in listening and speaking activities • lesson ends with song in TL	• learners expected to express themselves in TL too soon with too little structural knowledge • inaccuracy and vagueness in learner TL performance • need to learn by induction suits some students more than others

In its purest form, the practice of the direct method often created feelings of tension and exhaustion in both students and teacher. This was partly because of their mutual knowledge that their own first language, already mastered, was there as a potential resource (as well as a source of unclarified interference), yet was not being used.

Reading method

Rivers (1968: 22) suggests that the reading method of foreign-language teaching had pragmatic rather than theoretical origins, recommended as it was by a U.S. report (Coleman 1929) suggesting that a concentration on FL reading competence was the best that could be achieved for the majority of learners, who spent only two years studying a foreign language. Here is an interesting pre-echo of the concept of "partial competence" discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, with reference to the Communicative Use of English as a Foreign Language (CUEFL), Certificates in Communicative Skills in English (CCSE) and Certificates in English Language Skills (CELS) exams. Figure 1.3 presents the main features of the method.

Howatt links the 'reading-first', receptive before productive skills programmes of Marcel (1869) with the "more modern idiom" of Smith (1978: 50) and his emphasis on reading as a crucial cognitive process through which "readers must bring meaning to print rather than expect to receive something from it". The value of the reading method had also been noted by Michael West, an educationalist of the British descriptivist tradition, whose influential *General Service List of English Words* (1953) and *New Method Readers* (1935 onwards) helped learners to acquire vocabulary in a gradual though contextualised way.

Figure 1.3

The reading method

Approach	Objectives	Sample classroom activities	Problems
Reading	• to develop TL reading ability, intensive and extensive, as the realistic goal for most short-term TL learners • to develop correct pronunciation, basic grammar and aural comprehension, use of simple speech patterns, and basic writing skills, as required for TL reading ability	• students use short readers (e.g. 20 pp. continuous reading text) in simple TL based on frequency word-count • interesting/amusing stories, usually in TL settings • new words explained in TL footnotes • T. describes, in simple TL, setting of story	• learners tend to go for quantity (e.g. number of readers read) rather than quality of reading • graded readers made transition to authentic TL reading materials hard • neglect of aural-oral skills showed

		• T. reads first section of story aloud, students following in their books • T. asks questions in L1 re the reading • students re-read section silently, looking for answers to questions they were unable to answer, inferring meanings rather than using translation • T. asks further questions, in TL, students find answers in text, framing replies in TL • students continue reading story in pairs, or individually; T. helps as requested • at ends of sections, students take reader to T. who asks them questions in L1 • T. checks how many pages each student has completed • homework: written TL answers to questions on sections just read or project on related TL life, customs, etc.	

The audio-lingual approach

The 1960s saw a transitional trend, rather than a clear-cut switch, from the grammar-translation, direct and reading approaches of the 1940s and 1950s to what soon became known as the audio-lingual (or "aural-oral") method, itself, in Howatt's words, "derived from the structural approach developed by Fries at Michigan" (1984: 225).

Audio-lingual and structuralist approaches emerged, Wilga Rivers (1968: 38) suggests, under the influences of behavioural psychology (notably Skinner, e.g. 1957) and the American structural linguists (e.g. Bloomfield 1933, Fries 1945, Harris 1951) and anthropologists (e.g. Pike 1947), who analysed, described and explained the structures and systems of languages from listening to them in native-speaker use.