ResearchNotes

Contents

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Editorial Notes

Welcome to issue 12 of *Research Notes*, our quarterly publication reporting on matters relating to research, test development and validation within Cambridge ESOL.

We begin this issue with an obituary for Peter Hargreaves whose energy and commitment to Cambridge ESOL touched everyone with whom he had contact. Peter led Cambridge ESOL into the twenty-first century and it is fitting that this issue focuses on the impact of technology on Language Testing which is an area that Peter was very conversant with. Previous issues of *Research Notes* have included the following technology-related topics:

- The use of language corpora (Issues 1 and 6);
- LIBS, the Cambridge ESOL item-banking system (Issues 2 and 3);
- CB testing (Issues 4 and 5);
- CBIELTS and the comparison of handwritten and typed production (Issue 10).

This issue provides an overview of how technology is currently being used by Cambridge ESOL together with specific examples of how it is helping us to deliver language examinations to over a million candidates per year. Technology is a broad term and its wide relevance for Cambridge ESOL is reflected in the range of topics covered in this issue. In the lead article Neil Jones assesses Cambridge ESOL's approach to technology and highlights the links between Latent Trait Theory, language testing and improvements in technology. This general overview is followed by articles that describe how Cambridge ESOL applies technology to a range of activities including exam production, marking and grading and the activities of the Research and Validation Group, namely routine statistical analyses, longer-term research projects and building corpora.

Stuart Shaw presents ESM (Electronic Script Management) which is an innovative approach to marking examination papers via computers. This topic links to Stuart's article in the last issue where he discussed examiner attitudes to rating type-written and hand-written scripts and its potential impact on the assessment of writing. Computer-based (CB) testing is a growing field for Cambridge ESOL and Ardeshir Geranpayeh reviews the English version of the Quick Placement Test and reports current research in this issue. Fiona Barker reviews some of the recent developments in Learner Corpora based on a conference workshop. Corpora are an important means of storing and analysing examination materials, candidate scripts and speaking tests and this area of technology has rapidly become more important to Cambridge ESOL over the last decade. Continuing the Special Circumstances focus of the previous issue, Mike Gutteridge describes the range of assistive technology available for candidates with special needs. Chris Hubbard reports on feedback on oral examiner training for the revised CPE speaking test.

A number of snapshots describe how technology is applied to English language examinations. The use of questionnaires by Cambridge ESOL is often assisted by specific information management systems; the advantages of one of these, TELEform, is described by Roumen Marinov and Jenny Jones. The empowering nature of technology is particularly relevant to two new on-line systems: a new IELTS on-line verification system and Cambridge ESOL's new OnLine Teaching Resource for teachers.

Research and Validation Group staff have had a busy three months attending a range of conferences and workshops in the fields of applied linguistics, language testing and teaching. This issue includes reports on BALEAP and a symposium where external research students working on FCE and IELTS speaking test data had the opportunity to share their research findings and discuss the implications with Cambridge ESOL staff.

Finally, we include a call for proposals for Round 9 of the IELTS funded research programme and a call for CELTA trained teachers to help with an impact study.

Published May 2003

IN MEMORIAM

Peter Hargreaves

1942–2003

Chief Executive, University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations

PETER HARGREAVES, Chief Executive, University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations died peacefully at home on 17 January 2003, following a short illness.

Peter joined the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) as the first Director of English as a Foreign Language in May 1988. This followed a career of 21 years with the British Council with whom he served in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and London. His final post with the Council, before moving to UCLES, was as Senior Testing and Evaluation Advisor based at Spring Gardens in London.

Peter had a distinguished academic record. Following a First class honours degree in Classics from Durham, he embarked on a PhD at Churchill College Cambridge but decided that a career with the British Council was a preferable option to academic life at that time. However, he returned to the academic arena and completed a PhD in Linguistics at Leeds while working full time for the Council. His thesis focused on the '–ing' form in English, a topic which Peter only dwelt on rarely but always with good humour. Peter possessed a first class mind, as clearly demonstrated by his academic achievements, which served him well throughout his life but he also had that all too rare ability to turn his excellent mind to practical matters and it was in some ways this capacity that set him apart.

When Peter came to UCLES in 1988, EFL was really a fledgling operation despite the fact that it had been operating since 1913. The investment required to build it into what it has become today had not been made. However, thanks to the foresight of the then Secretary, John Reddaway, and his capacity to pick the right person for the job, Peter was appointed to lead EFL into the 21st century and was, over the years, given the resources to do so. In 1988 EFL at UCLES needed the vision that Peter was to bring. With about 200,000 candidates it was large and well-known throughout the world but it needed to be modernised and prepared to deal with the future – it needed a new identity and it was Peter who forged that identity in the fourteen years that he spent at UCLES. Through an enormous amount of hard work, often at a very detailed level, Peter led the EFL team into a new world and a new century. He travelled extensively, got to know thousands of people and developed strong personal relationships everywhere he went. In many ways he became the face of EFL – everyone knew him and significantly, he knew everyone. He established the Local Secretary Meetings in many countries and normally attended most of them every year. He listened hard to what people wanted and, wherever he could, provided them with a better service and better exams. From the four exams offered by EFL in 1988 (CPE, FCE, PET and ELTS) Peter spearheaded the introduction of many more thus providing the Cambridge ESOL of today with the most comprehensive and coherent offering of any exam board anywhere in the world. Yet he never stinted with regard to quality and integrity on a professional or personal level.

Hard work and great success there may have been but what of Peter the man? Everyone who knew him could see that Peter cared a great deal. He cared about his family and was enormously proud of it. He often spoke of the family and especially, most recently, of his three grandchildren. He cared about the people that he worked with and showed great personal kindness to many of them. He cared about his religion and always tried to get to church on Sunday even when travelling. He cared about his profession and gave excellent presentations at many conferences throughout the world. He loved playing the guitar and singing and it did not take much to get him involved in a sing-song. Peter also had a great sense of humour and a wonderful ability to do impersonations. His observations on life and work were startlingly clear and always very clever. Peter was much loved and respected and will be greatly missed.

Peter leaves behind his wife Anne, daughters Jo and Kate, son David and three grandchildren.

The Role of Technology in Language Testing

NEIL JONES, RESEARCH AND VALIDATION GROUP

The theme of this issue of *Research Notes* is technology, or, to be more precise, information technology. The extraordinary development of information technology has of course transformed Cambridge ESOL's business, as it has every business and every field of life. Examples of such changes to our business processes include the fact that nowadays the majority of entries for Cambridge ESOL exams are made electronically; that test papers once edited can be sent directly for digital printing, cutting out a whole desktop publishing stage; that learners and teachers can instantly access a wealth of information about the exams by visiting our website. But these are just examples of very general developments in information technology, that are having profound effects everywhere on the efficiency of work, speed of communication, and so on. In this issue we shall try to focus not only on technology as it impacts on business, but rather as it impacts on the business of language testing.

Does technology simply allow language testers to do their traditional work more efficiently, or does it actually change conceptions of what language testing is, and of the scope of relevant concerns for language testers? Other professions have been transformed by what technology makes possible – medicine would be a good example – so why not language testing?

From the perspective of Research and Validation (the group which publishes *Research Notes*) it is clear that the huge increase in our ability to capture and process data makes quantitative analytic approaches possible which were previously impossible, and that this has a real impact on our view of language testing. An important example of this is what I shall call the rise of the Measurement Metaphor.

The measurement metaphor derives from a statistical approach called latent trait theory. It invites us to view language proficiency as a property like length or weight or temperature which can be precisely quantified, allowing learners and testing tasks to be co-located on a single measurement scale, and the interactions of learners with tasks to be predicted. In this way the characteristic features of different levels of proficiency can be captured. As a communicative language teacher who moved into statistics and computation, I can bear first-hand testimony to the seductive power of the measurement metaphor. What was really going on in my students' heads as they studied? How could you characterise their level? Or their progress? These questions had been worrying me for some time when I chanced upon a presentation of latent trait theory in a language testing primer. There was an answer! I also realised with excitement that as a microcomputer hobbyist with some fledgling skill at programming in Basic I could jump straight from theory to practice. On a tiny BBC B machine in 1987 I wrote my first item banking program and computer-adaptive test. I believe that this personal history repeats in microcosm the recent history of language testing: new theories and methods make an impact when they do not just because they promise to solve important problems, but crucially because technological advance makes them practical.

At Cambridge ESOL today the whole exam production cycle, from pretesting and test construction through to grading, is organised around a latent trait measurement approach. At the heart of it all is LIBS – the Local Item Banking System: a sophisticated PC-based software system developed in-house by Cambridge ESOL. The measurement metaphor is now so familiar that it is easy to forget how different things used to be. The current Cambridge English language "main suite" examinations developed over a long period (first was Proficiency, in 1913, last the Key English Test, KET, in 1994). Each exam was added in response to a perceived need at that level, and came to provide a focus for teaching, increasingly supported by coursebooks and other materials tailored to the exam. The meaning of a level was enshrined in the understanding of teachers, publishers, and the examiners. The relation between levels was conceived of, if at all, in pedagogic terms: the number of hours of study, say, needed to move from one level to another. Latent trait methods began to be used in the early 1990's, and a linking of the five levels of Cambridge exams onto a common measurement scale was first attempted in 1994.

Should we then talk of a genuine paradigm shift in our approach to language testing, prompted by technological change? In some ways yes. However, that would imply rejection of previous approaches, whereas what has happened is considerably more interesting: a complementary approach in which the measurement metaphor provides a framework for interpreting and comparing Cambridge ESOL exams – the similarities and differences that result from their level, their purpose, their target candidates, their relatedness to programs of study, and so on. The measurement approach builds on and enhances the traditional strengths of the exams.

Indeed, the particular metaphor of the "framework", suggesting a multidimensional measurement system that underpins, links and identifies commonality among a diverse variety of phenomena, seems to be an important current theme in language testing. Is it fanciful to suggest that the Council of Europe Common Framework of Reference (2001), for example, reflects the rise of the measurement metaphor? The CEF framework addresses what is clearly an important need in the multilingual, multicultural but economically highly integrated community which is modern Europe: to provide a common scale to describe levels of language

proficiency, facilitating comparison across educational programs, language qualifications, language needs for particular professional purposes, and so on. Efforts to develop the framework and work within it will doubtless illustrate both the power and the limitations of latent traits methods and of the measurement metaphor.

So in this positive view technological advance makes possible that which was previously impossible, and this not only changes language testing but moves us forward. However, a more sceptical view is prevalent that technology has a narrowing, constraining influence: that it imposes certain solutions on language testing simply because they *are* possible, rather than valid. Examples include the use of simulated oral proficiency interviews, where a candidate interacts with a recorded interlocutor and his performance is recorded for later assessment, or the use of e-rating to mark extended writing. Currently Cambridge ESOL uses neither of these approaches, but rather invests much effort in the maintenance of a world-wide cadre of trained oral examiners, and likewise in the training of writing examiners. Our current view is that it is difficult to demonstrate the validity of these technology-mediated procedures for testing performance skills, where interaction and communicative effect are integral aspects of what is tested. However, technological advance (e.g. video-conferencing, CD-Rom) can undoubtedly make a valuable contribution in areas related to performance testing, such as the training and standardisation of examiners (see for example Stuart Shaw's article below).

Computer-based testing (CB) is also frequently criticised as limited by the need to use machine marking and task types that involve relatively simple responses. Cambridge ESOL has developed a range of CB tests, so far mostly for low-stakes purposes such as placement. These use up to ten or more formally different task types and work well within their limits (speaking or extended writing skills are not tested). A CB version of IELTS – certainly a high-stakes test – is currently being trialled and may be made available as an alternative to the paper version. It is a close analogue of the paper test, and speaking and writing skills will continue to be assessed by trained raters. However, there will be the option to submit the Writing component either via computer (i.e. by word-processing) or on paper. This raises interesting issues of the equivalence of CB and paper and pencil (P&P) testing modes – issues which will become more pressing as CB testing develops in new directions, becoming less similar to P&P tests. Where traditional and technology-based tests exist side-by-side the concept of strict equivalence is necessarily called into question, as indeed is the assumption that standardisation of method is fundamental to how fairness in testing is assured. Fairness may be seen as rather a bias for best – where for example either word-processed or hand-written production is allowed, depending on the candidate's preference.

Thus technology may lead us not only to test in new ways, but actually to revisit some basic premises of testing.

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Electronic Script Management: towards on-screen assessment of scanned paper scripts

STUART D SHAW, RESEARCH AND VALIDATION GROUP

Introduction

Technology is finding a key place in education. New technology has provided opportunities to improve the manner in which education is delivered and assessed (Maughan 2001:1). Bennett argues that the inexorable advance of technology will force fundamental changes in the format and content of assessment and that the incorporation of technological expertise into assessment is inevitable (2002:1).

There is little doubt that the rapid emergence of new technologies and increased global communication have engendered substantial changes in the nature of writing itself in terms of the ways in which writing is composed, the genres created, the authorial identities assumed, the forms finished products take and the ways in which the reader is engaged (Hyland 2002:73). Moreover, electronic communication technologies have affected the way writing is used and the manner in which it is tested (Weigle 2002:231). Concomitant with these changes is the impact of technology on the assessment of writing.

The Electronic Script Management (ESM) programme is one of a number of initiatives commissioned by UCLES in an attempt to take advantage of new technologies to modernise the conduct of examinations and as such is designed to support human examiners in the assessment of paper scripts.

The research programme constitutes two major sets of objectives (Palmer and Raikes 2000:1):

- to investigate practical possibilities and the impact on process quality and time, and
- to provide data for research to enable an evaluation of the

impact on assessment reliability of handling documents on-screen rather than on paper.

ESM defines the process by which scripts are scanned at pre-determined locations under Cambridge ESOL control, this being related to their imaging and capture strategy, and the relevant images transmitted electronically to an image server at Cambridge ESOL. Copies of these images are then distributed electronically and marked on-screen by examiners. Question level marks and examiners' annotations are also captured electronically throughout the marking process, without manual intervention, for onward processing by existing back office systems.

It is highly likely, at least for the foreseeable future, that potential Cambridge ESOL candidates will require the provision of both paper-based and computerised examinations. The paper scanning approach allows employment of the same basic infrastructure to process both types of assessment, facilitating a smooth transition to on-line assessment and permitting maximum flexibility to meet the needs of future candidates.

Improving Assessment Quality

ESM is able to improve assessment quality in a number of ways :

- ESM enables faster and more flexible assessment and script management by:
  - *Improved script monitoring* enabling the status of a script to be identified at any point throughout the process, thereby ensuring tighter management and rapid identification of bottlenecks;
  - *Dynamic apportionment of scripts* to offsite examiners ensuring that scripts are only allocated and distributed to examiners when they are ready to receive them thus ensuring that no examiner is without work while others are over-loaded.
- ESM permits effective double marking by allowing the same script to be marked by two examiners simultaneously. Moreover, as ESM is web-based and could potentially support online co-ordination, there is no restriction on recruiting examiners from beyond the UK, thereby greatly augmenting the potential examiner base;
- ESM ensures greater consistency between teams. Currently, assessment quality is very much dependant upon the calibre of the Team Leader. Any inconsistency which may exist across teams is difficult to detect. The widespread use of comparative performance data and standardised scripts should improve the consistency of marking between teams;
- ESM provides the potential for an on-line mechanism for more effective examiner co-ordination. Satisfactorily performing examiners, whose competence has been proven, may be released to engage in the marking process whilst those examiners requiring extra standardisation may be given further assistance by comparing their marks with definitive marks and annotations. Data on performance may be collated throughout the marking process in order to observe trends;
- ESM facilitates effective interaction between examiners and their supervisors on the quality of their marking. Automatic generation of statistics, based on direct comparisons between examiner marks and definitively marked scripts, provide immediate information on the quality of examiner marking. Tighter feedback mechanisms will enhance training, improve examiner standards quickly and provide assurance that such standards are being consistently maintained;
- ESM enhances fairness in all aspects of assessment through random script allocation and by anonymisation of script origin, thus eliminating the possible risk of examiner bias;
- ESM is able to supplement existing feedback mechanisms which presently include item pre-testing and post-marking performance grading for analysis of question/item and examiner performance.

CAE PILOT TRIAL

Cambridge ESOL's first major test of on-screen marking of scanned paper scripts was conducted in Spring 2001. The principal aims of the trial were to :

- investigate alternative methods of marking scripts;
- prove the practical possibility of the scanning and electronic movement of scripts;
- give Cambridge ESOL the opportunity to evaluate the procedure by comparing examiner experience with the actuality of the on-site marking exercise;
- compare marking throughput and marks awarded;
- uncover issues, both technical and human, to be investigated in later stages of the development of a production system;
- provide research data concerning examiner reliability.

For this purpose 1500 CAE Greek and Portuguese writing scripts (syllabus 0151) from the December 2000 administration were scanned and double-marked on-screen by examiners who had not marked that paper.

The Writing component of the CAE examination consists of two tasks: a compulsory task in Part 1 and one from a choice of four in Part 2. Candidates are expected to write about 250 words for each task and task types, designed to be written for a given purpose and target reader, can include newspaper and magazine articles, formal/informal letters, reports, proposals and reviews. An impression mark is awarded to each piece of writing and all tasks carry the same maximum mark. During marking, each examiner is apportioned scripts chosen on a random basis from the whole entry in order to ensure there is no concentration of good or weak scripts or of one large centre in the allocation of any one examiner. Each script is marked twice by different examiners, and where there is significant disagreement in the marks allocated, the script is marked a third time.

Currently, groups of CAE examiners are invited to mark at a convenient location over a weekend. The trial examiner group consisted of 1 Principal Examiner (PE), 2 Team Leaders (TL) and

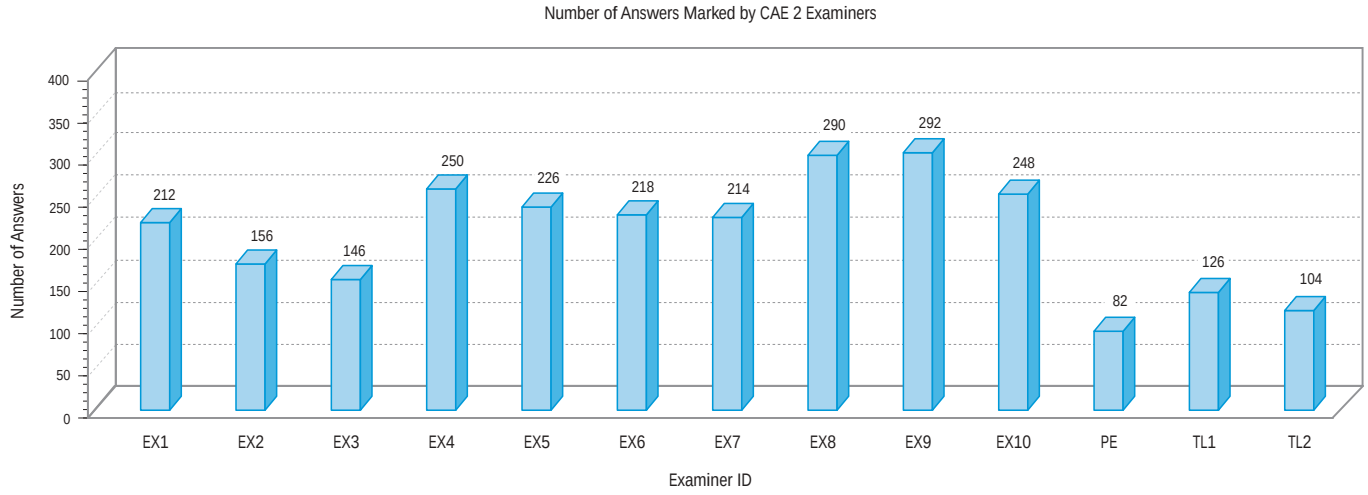

Figure 1: Examiner marking throughput

10 Assistant Examiners (AE). All examiners were graded A/A* for their last two performance evaluations, demonstrated a range of abilities and marking skills, were enthusiastic, available, computer literate and lived within one hour of Cambridge.

Examiners were given a training session in the use of the latest version of PaperView (an on-line marking software package) on the Friday evening. Both the pre-marking and on-the-day co-ordination were paper-based. Following a co-ordination meeting on the Saturday morning, examiners marked scripts throughout the remainder of the weekend. Examiners were apportioned scripts on the fly from a batch queue and the scripts were double marked and, where appropriate, third marked. The scripts were stored in packs of 10 in centre and candidate order.

The results of this trial were then compared with the results from the actual paper-based marking of the same scripts.

Examiner Marking and Throughput

Figure 1 shows that the highest number of answers marked by an Assistant Examiner is 292 and the lowest is 146. EX9's marking rate was therefore double that of EX3. If the Assistant Examiners had been marking on paper we would have expected to have an average rate of marking of about 200 scripts, and with 2 answers per script, this would mean a figure of 400 answers marked. The overall rate of marking for this trial was 56% of what would have been expected from conventional paper marking.

The average (mean) number of answers marked by Assistant Examiners is 225.2. There are a number of reasons why the figure is lower than paper based marking:

- On the first day especially, Examiners were learning to use the applications as well as marking;
- The technology is, at the moment, in the development stage and is not easy or quick to use;
- At times the server was slow to download scripts to waiting Examiners;
- On the Saturday there were interruptions caused by a faulty network hub which affected 5 Examiners;
- The Examiners knew that this was a trial and a 'proof of concept' exercise and this may have influenced their motivation to mark as quickly as possible;
- Screen marking, by its nature, may be slower than paper marking;
- Examiners may be slower at screen marking to start with but may gain speed with time.

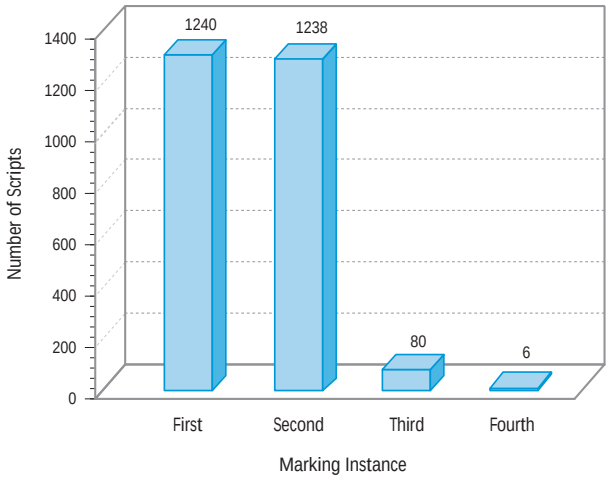

Figure 2: First, second, third and fourth markings

Figure 2 shows that the number of first and second markings is almost the same which demonstrates that the workflow system was allocating work correctly. 80 of the 1240 scripts which were first and second marked were referred for third marking. 6 of these scripts went on to be fourth marked.

Figure 3 shows examiner throughput for the first day of marking. With the exception of EX2, all Examiners demonstrated an increased output on the Saturday afternoon. It must be remembered, however, that the Co-ordination meeting took place on the Saturday morning and that several technical difficulties were encountered during this period. As a consequence, the morning was significantly shorter than the afternoon. Despite this, some increases were marginal (EX4) whilst others were substantial

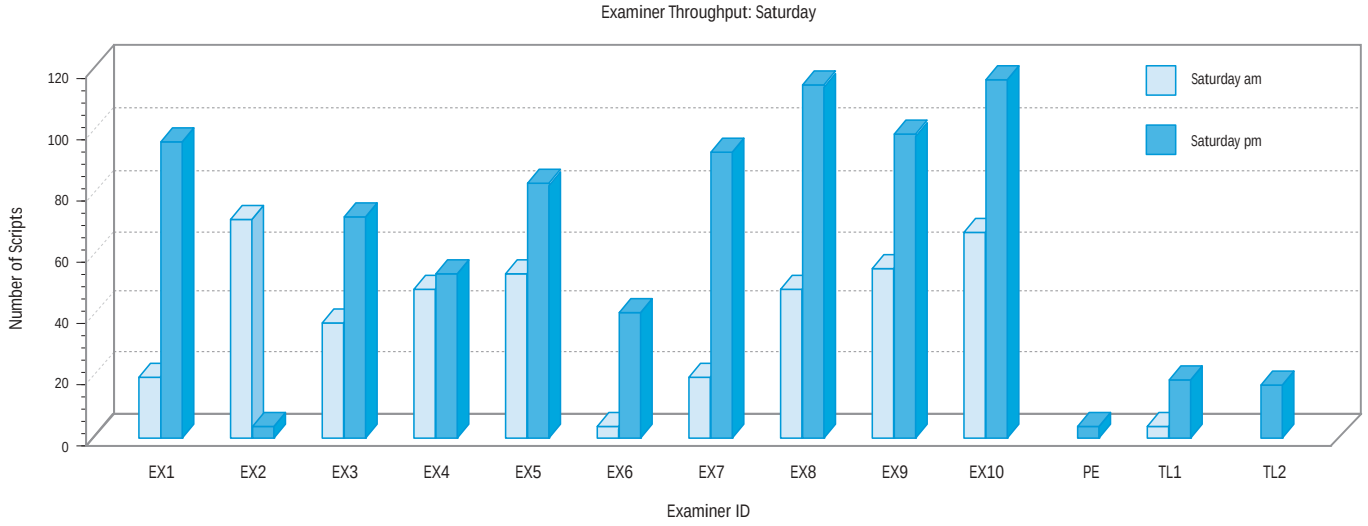

Figure 3: First day examiner marking throughput

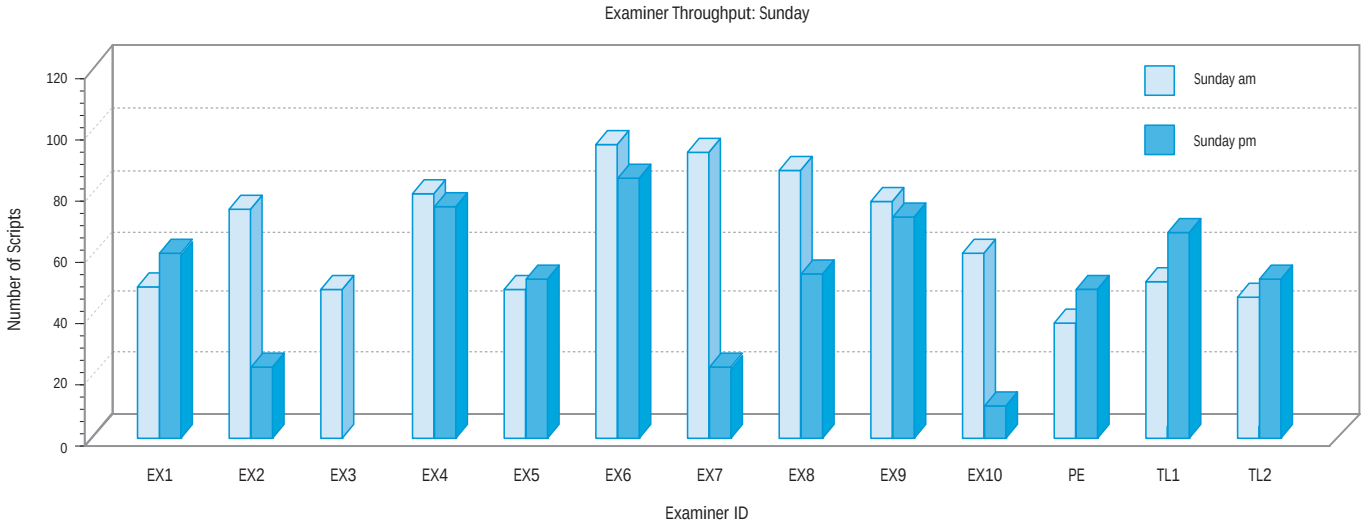

Figure 4: Second day examiner marking throughput

(EX1, EX6 and EX7). On average, productivity increased by 4.5 times between the morning and afternoon sessions.

Figure 4 shows the marking throughput for the second day. By Sunday, examiners were well into their stride. There was a greater consistency in marking productivity over the morning and afternoon sessions. Interestingly, only two examiners (EX1 and EX5) increased their output during the afternoon. Although the afternoon session was shorter than the morning session, tiredness or fatigue may have accounted for the fact that 80% of examiners marked fewer scripts in the afternoon.

Conclusion

The pilot study demonstrated that examiners found the system user-friendly and were, in general, favourably disposed towards this style of marking, conscious of its great potential. In terms of examiner productivity, the overall rate of marking for the trial was approximately half of what would have been expected from conventional marking. However, the number of first and second markings during the trial was the same indicating that the work flow system was allocating work correctly. Initial marking speeds were slower than with conventional paper marking but this was attributed to the novelty value of the system. Statistics for both the first day afternoon and the second day morning showed a substantially higher marking rate. Statistical analysis of the marking indicated that examiners awarded marginally higher marks on-screen for both the compulsory and optional writing questions and over a slightly narrower range of scores than on paper. The difference in marking medium, however, did not appear to have a significant impact on marks.

Cambridge ESOL is engaged in a programme of research and development to identify the refinements needed for a production quality system and the contexts in which screen-based marking is fully valid and reliable. Pilot findings would suggest that ESM is promising from a number of different aspects, including reliability.

The ESM Working Group are proposing further trials to be undertaken with a view to introducing ESM to examiner-marked papers in time, with full double marking as the preferred option for all Cambridge ESOL examinations. On-line examiner co-ordination will be explored more fully in an article presented in *Research Notes 13*.

References and Further Reading

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A quick review of the English Quick Placement Test

ARDESHIR GERANPAYEH, RESEARCH AND VALIDATION GROUP

Introduction

The Quick Placement Test (QPT) is a flexible test of English language proficiency developed by Oxford University Press and Cambridge ESOL to give teachers a reliable and time-saving method of finding a student's level of English. It is quick and easy to administer and is ideal for placement testing and examination screening. There are two versions available, a *computer-based* (CB) version and a *paper and pen* (P&P) version.

The key features of the QPT are as follows:

A. The Computer-based version

- The test is adaptive, so different candidates see different questions;
- It takes 15–20 minutes to administer;
- All the questions in the test are in multiple-choice format;
- Answers are keyed directly into the computer;
- The test is marked by the computer and the result is generated immediately;
- The test scores can be compared with the paper and pen version.

B. The Paper and pen version

- Has two parallel versions;
- It takes approximately 30 minutes to administer;
- All the questions in the test are in multiple-choice format;
- Answers are recorded directly on the answer sheet;
- The answer sheets can be quickly marked using the overlays provided;
- The test consists of two parts. Part 1 is taken by all candidates. Part 2 is for higher ability students only;
- The test scores can be compared with the computer-based version.

Who is it for?

The QPT is designed to help teachers and course managers make rapid decisions about which class to place students in or whether a learner can join a particular course, such as an exam class. The test can be used for learners of all levels and all ages.

The *computer-based version* uses multiple choice questions to assess students in *Listening, Reading*, and *Structure,* including grammar and vocabulary.

The *paper and pen version* can be used to place students in classes in the same way as the *computer-based version* but in circumstances where the CBT (computer-based test) is not feasible, for example, because of technical limitations. All students who take the paper and pen version should complete Part One. Part Two should only be completed by those students who have scored more than a predetermined score in Part One.

As with the computer-based version, the test administrators will probably want to combine the test score with other forms of assessment, such as speaking and writing skills, to get an overall picture of proficiency that is most appropriate for the objectives of their courses.

How do you use it?

The QPT can be used in different ways:

- Before the course starts, so that students can obtain immediate feedback on whether there is a suitable class for them;
- On the first day of the course, so that students can be placed in class quickly and smoothly;
- To place late arrivals at any time into existing classes;
- To decide whether students are eligible for particular courses, such as Cambridge exam preparation classes.

Table 1: Look-up table for computer-based and paper and pen scores

ALTE Level		Paper and pen test score		Computer-based test score
Level	**Description**	**Part 1 Score out of 40**	**Parts 1 & 2 Score out of 60**	
0.1	Beginner	0–9	0–10	0–29
0.2	Breakthrough	10–15	11–17	30–39
1	Elementary	16–23	18–29	40–49
2	Lower intermediate	24–30	30–39	50–59
3	Upper intermediate	31–40	40–47	60–69
4	Advanced	If a student scores 36 or more it is recommended they complete Part 2 of	48–54	70–79
5	Very advanced	the test.	55–60	80–100

Scores from the *computer-based version* are reported on a scale out of 100 at the end of the test.

The *pen and paper version* consists of two parts. Part 1 (questions 1–40) is taken by all candidates and is aimed at students who are at or below intermediate level. The second part (questions 41–60), is taken only by candidates who score more than 35 out of 40 on the first part and can be used for higher ability students. The test is quickly marked out of 40 or 60 using a simple overlay, summarised in Table 1.

Each institution will need to develop its own scales to make the best use of QPT results and should experiment with different testing procedures and techniques to find the best way to interpret QPT scores meaningfully against that institution's levels systems, syllabus frameworks, class/year-group organisation, teaching materials and other assessment procedures.

Although scores on the computer-based and paper and pen versions can be compared using Table 1, it is recommended that institutions as a general rule stick to using one version only. This is because the two versions are testing slightly different things – for example, the computer-based version has a listening component and the paper and pen version does not.

Scores for both versions are linked to the ALTE and Council of Europe levels as shown in Table 2.

The QPT is **not** appropriate for repeated use as a **progress** test, as it is not based on a particular course or syllabus.

Test development and validation

An important advantage of the Quick Placement Test is that it reports test results as a band on the ALTE 5-level scale. This makes the result potentially much more useful to end users. The band descriptors represent an outcome of early validation work with 'Can-Do' statements. The ALTE 'Can-Do' Project is ongoing work which is refining these statements, in the process of constructing a European cross-language framework for language proficiency. See Jones (2000) for the background to the validation of the ALTE 'Can-Do' Project.

Table 2: Table of equivalent levels

ALTE Level	ALTE Level Description	Council of Europe Level	Cambridge ESOL
0.1	Beginner	—	
0.2	Breakthrough	A1	
1	Elementary	A2	KET
2	Lower Intermediate	B1	PET BEC Preliminary CELS Preliminary
3	Upper Intermediate	B2	FCE BEC Vantage CELS Vantage
4	Advanced	C1	CAE BEC Higher CELS Higher
5	Very Advanced	C2	CPE

All of the test items in the QPT have been through Cambridge ESOL quality control procedures; however, additional steps have been taken to assess the overall reliability of the QPT and the relationship of scores between it and those derived from the paper and pen versions. See Beeston (2000) for a description of these quality control procedures.

To date, the test has been validated in 20 countries by more than 6,000 students. There were three validation phases in the course of QPT development.

Phase 1

The first phase of trialling involved students from a variety of countries taking the electronic Quick Placement Test and one of the two paper and pen tests. They also completed a questionnaire indicating the extent to which they were comfortable using a computer. Teachers provided detailed feedback on the look and feel of the paper and pen tests and some of the items in the electronic version of the QPT, and on how accurate the tests were in terms of identifying the current level of their students.

As a result of this, the paper and pen tests were changed and the QPT database modified to include more lower level items with an increase in lexico-grammatical items at the lower level.

Phase 2

With the format of the tests confirmed, the second phase of activity concentrated on determining score equivalence between the electronic version of QPT and the paper and pen versions, and also between two successive administrations of the QPT. The aim was to assess how consistently students were located on the same score and what degree of error was associated with these scores.

'Error' refers to the fact that in any measuring process there will be some inconsistency. If you were to weigh yourself five times in the same day, you would notice that the recorded weight varied slightly. In testing terms, there is a notion of True Score Theory, which states that if a candidate took a test an infinite number of times, the average score would be the true score and the range of scores around that average score would indicate the error range for that test. By investigating the reliability of the test scores as well as the tests themselves, we have produced a test which is both reliable and practical. The SEM of the test is around 4 and the typical reliabilities reported during the trial phases are close to 0.9 for the 60 item test and 0.85 for the 40 item test.

Phase 3

Cambridge ESOL is currently conducting further research into the Quick Placement Test. The research aims to examine the degree of equivalence between the two modes of administration and to provide updated information about the reliability of the test. A large number of candidates from several centres around the world have completed both CB and P&P versions and this will enable us to monitor and compare performance in both tests. The results of this on-going research will be reported in a future issue of *Research Notes*.

How to obtain QPT?

For further information on distribution and availability of the QPT please contact:

Alex Birtles or Sally Leonard at English Language Teaching, Promotions Department, Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP.
Telephone: +44 (0)1865 267627
e-mail: alex.birtles@oup.com

You can view a demonstration version of the QPT on-line at http://www.oup.com/shockwave_flash/elt/qpt/qptdemo/.

References

Beeston, S (2000): The UCLES EFL item banking system, *Research Notes* 2, 8–9.

Jones, N (2000): Background to the validation of the ALTE 'Can-Do' project and the revised Common European Framework, *Research Notes* 2, 11–13.

Recent Developments in Learner Corpora

FIONA BARKER, RESEARCH AND VALIDATION GROUP

Introduction

On the 27th March four workshops were held as pre-conference events for Corpus Linguistics 2003 at Lancaster University. I attended the Learner Corpora workshop which is relevant to the work of Cambridge ESOL in developing and exploiting corpora, one area of technology that has grown rapidly in the last decade. This article reports on the learner corpus workshop and highlights key areas of relevance for Cambridge ESOL.

The first learner corpus symposium was held at the 1996 AILA conference (University Jyväskylä, Finland) and the first international symposium on Corpus Linguistics (CL) was held in Hong Kong two years later. The main research group involved in learner corpora is the ICLE team (International Corpus of Learner English) based at the Centre for English Corpus Linguistics in Louvain, Belgium. However, half of the workshop presenters were not connected with this group which reflects the current growth in learner corpora world-wide. Twenty-five people participated in this workshop including researchers from European, Asian and African institutions. A range of learner corpora were described, encouragingly not all of learner English. Alongside presentations about Japanese, Taiwanese, South African and European learners of English, there were

presentations about Dutch and Basque learner corpora.

The workshop covered the following themes:

- Corpus Linguistics
- Learner Corpora
- Lexis and Discourse

The most relevant presentations from each session are described below.

1. Corpus Linguistics

The first session of the workshop considered Corpus Linguistics as a research methodology.

Learner Corpora: design, development and applications

Yukio Tono (Meikai University, Japan) outlined a range of issues concerning the design, development and applications of learner corpora. Firstly, Tono stated that corpus builders should specify sampling criteria clearly and develop corpora using long-term, sustainable solutions. Researchers should also consider whether they actually need to use a corpus; whether existing corpora are appropriate for their research and should also justify any corpus-based approach, all things that Cambridge ESOL tries to do. If a corpus is not accompanied by an explanation of how it was built or the source of its data it may not be as useful as researchers hope. Corpora are sometimes used just because they exist and it is certainly easier to use an established collection of data rather than to do one's own data collection. Thus corpus researchers should take it upon themselves to justify and explain why a particular corpus has been used for a research project and to consider carefully whether an existing corpus fulfils their research aims.

The issue of the nature of learner language was raised as this tends to be more task-related than in the reference corpora that learner corpora are often compared to. A reference corpus is a collection of native writer text such as the British National Corpus or the COBUILD corpus that is used to compare other texts against in most CL research. The implications of comparing reference corpora with learner corpora was a recurring theme throughout the workshop. Another design issue raised was that probabilistic language modelling requires different levels of language proficiency to be represented in a learner corpus. Whereas Cambridge ESOL has different learner levels represented in both its written and spoken learner corpora, and can be certain of what each level means, other corpora may have a less rigorously maintained notion of level. Learner corpora that are developed from a range of sources may be unable to accurately represent a level that equates to *Intermediate* as interpretations differ according to what this means and the amount and type of learning associated with '*two years of English*' will clearly differ. This suggests that sufficient data should be collected on the background of corpus contributions in future.

The processing and analysis of learner corpora was then considered. Statistical techniques are increasingly being used to analyse corpus data although the use of basic frequency measures is insufficient for many studies. A range of more complex statistical tests were suggested which would provide better analyses of the corpus data available (e.g. comparing mean frequencies, data reduction procedures and cause/effect analyses). Tono concluded that statistical procedures are not yet exploited fully by corpus analysts, which is an area that Cambridge ESOL should explore, given our expertise in the statistical analysis of test data.

Finally Tono considered various applications of corpora in the following areas:

- pedagogical uses, e.g. teaching materials and curriculum design;
- lexicography, e.g. dictionary production;
- Second Language Acquisition (SLA), e.g. verify existing SLA claims;
- Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIA), e.g. implications for materials design.

Tono advocated that researchers adopt a variety of corpus analysis techniques and exchange ideas with other researchers, for example Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) researchers. SLA researchers have recently started to use frequencies in publications although they may require guidance on how best to analyse the data using more complex statistics which corpus linguists are in a position to do.

This presentation reinforced the unique and positive benefits of CL together with the overriding notion that researchers should make their data available for others which is not always possible in the case of sensitive data such as Cambridge ESOL examination scripts. Although institutions like Cambridge ESOL and publishers have been developing learner corpora for a decade now, there has not yet been enough discussion of the use of corpora in testing and other areas which Cambridge ESOL hopes to rectify at future conferences. We also hope to build on the links we have already established with researchers whose work has implications for our own, such as the work being done in Nottingham on spoken corpora by Mike McCarthy and others.

Yukio Tono flagged up the challenges facing the relatively new field of Corpus Linguistics and the role and nature of Learner Corpora within this. The Cambridge Learner Corpus is now bearing fruit after ten years of collaboration with CUP so we agree that corpus building is definitely not a short-term exercise. The next presentation emphasised how learner corpora can fruitfully be applied to studying language acquisition.

Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis Revisited

Agnieska Leńko-Szymańska (Łódź University, Poland) reviewed how Granger's notion of Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIA) had been interpreted by CL researchers (Granger, 1998). According to Gass and Selinker (1994: 11):

> *'Learners create a language system, known as an interlanguage (IL)… composed of numerous elements, not the least of which are elements from the [native language] and the [target*

language]. What is important is that the learners themselves impose structure on the available linguistic data and formulate an internalized system (IL)'.

Leńko-Szymańska explored how Polish learners used demonstratives (*this, that, these, those*) in her analysis of learner language. The aim of the research was to develop a suitable model for advanced Polish students learning English. She compared learner essays with native writer essays together with standard reference corpora (e.g. the BNC), newspaper collections and a textbook corpus. She noted the difficulty of finding naturalistic data that matches the typical genre and topic of learner writing, as the topics covered in examinations or classroom work are rarely reflected in real world texts. This observation surely has implications for both classroom and testing practices, although it should be noted that Cambridge ESOL's examinations are based on the communicative language construct and materials are based on real texts wherever possible.

Leńko-Szymańska analysed both non-native learner writing and non-professional native writing. Interestingly, she found that both learners and native writers use more high frequency words than the reference corpora and in some areas the learners used words more frequently than native writers. The conclusions of this study were that teachers should refer both to established reference corpora as well as native corpora of equivalent and other levels as these all represent different norms of language. The idea of norms is clearly relevant to the work of Cambridge ESOL (see Lynda Taylor's article on assessing World Englishes in *Research Notes 10*).

The value of the standard reference corpus was reappraised by this presentation as were corpora of native student writing. Interestingly, proficiency levels were equated to different levels of interlanguage which suggests a way in which Cambridge ESOL can make links with interlanguage researchers who may be interested in exploring different levels of proficiency.

TRIO Project

Kevin Mark (Meiji University, Japan) spoke about the TRIO project which is part of a 'living' curriculum that is enjoyable, participative and encourages growth and empowerment in university students learning English. One part of the TRIO project is a parallel corpus called Lexispace that includes learners' diaries in English, a reformulated version (by the native speaker tutor) and students' translations into Japanese based on the two versions. This database and the other materials developed by these students, including video presentations, form part of new curriculum that new students can refer to and add to.

Mark asked the question 'Why haven't learner corpora been looked at from an education perspective?'. The answer he provided was that corpus building is time-consuming and therefore goes against the immediate demands placed on curriculum designers and teachers. This attitude also pervades the language testing field as few examination boards use corpora to inform the development and validation of their examinations to the extent that Cambridge ESOL does.

L2 acquisition of tense-aspect markings

Ping-Yu Huang (and David Wible, Tamkang University, Taiwan) spoke about the acquisition of tense aspect markers based on the English Taiwan Learner Corpus (English TLC). Their hypothesis was that lexical aspect determines tense markings in L2 data but this had not been investigated before. One finding from their study was that 82 verbs were wrongly inflected for past tense e.g. *He would made it* or *I would sang for you*. They concluded that L2 learners make distinctive use of tense markers which has implications for teaching and testing language.

2. Learner Corpora

In the second session of the workshop a number of presentations explored specific learner corpora.

ICLE Corpus

Fanny Meunier (Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium) gave a short demonstration of the ICLE corpus which contains over 2 million words of learner English and can be searched by a range of variables including 1st, 2nd and 3rd language spoken at home and months in an English speaking country. The Cambridge Learner Corpus also allows searches based on a wide range of variables which enables CUP and Cambridge ESOL researchers and authors to get the most out of this corpus.

Meunier also spoke about the FREETEXT project, (French in context) which is a CALL system (computer-assisted language learning). Another CALL project is described below.

Basque Corpus

Bertol Arrieta (XIA Group, University of the Basque Country) described a range of natural language processing projects being undertaken in relation to a corpus of learner Basque. These include a database with information about the learning process of students learning Basque and a database of learner errors. The aim of the XIA Group is to create tools such as a robust Basque grammar and spelling corrector and a computer-assisted language-learning environment for Basque.

TLEC Corpus

Lande Schäfer (Potchefstroom University, South Africa) talked about the issues involved with tagging a learner corpus. Tagging consists of applying part of speech (POS) labels to texts so that linguistic features can be analysed and the texts can be parsed (assigned a syntactic structure to enable more detailed analysis). The Tswana Learner English Corpus (TLEC) was used in this study. The TLEC includes argumentative essays written by advanced learners of English in South Africa. This corpus was tagged using three different tagging systems and each was assessed according to the influence of learner errors on their accuracy. Interestingly, Schäfer noted that learner errors were not the largest cause of tagging errors when spelling errors were removed from learner texts. The best performing tagger was the CLAWS tagger although

the uneven number of tags in the three tagsets used would have influenced the results, an audience member noted.

Currently the Cambridge Learner Corpus has neither been tagged or parsed, with the exception of the five million words that have been manually tagged for learner error. Diane Nicholls (CUP) described the error-coded part of the CLC in another presentation. The reasons for error-coding the CLC include: to separate and analyse correct and incorrect uses; to determine the real significance of errors; to enable searching on error codes and to establish errors of commission and omission. If tagged and parsed the CLC would be an even more useful resource allowing the automated analysis of learner language. This is an area under consideration by Cambridge ESOL both for the written CLC and for the spoken corpus under development.

SST Corpus

Emi Izume and colleagues (Communications Research Lab, Japan) described a study based on the SST Corpus (Standard Speaking Test Corpus) which is a corpus of Japanese learners of English taking oral interviews. The SST Corpus consists of 1 million words of 15 minute oral interviews at 9 levels. The OPI used to form the corpus was the ACTFL-ALC. The question Izume posed was 'What features of the SST corpora influence proficiency analysis?'. Izume noted the underuse of article systems in the candidates' speech and other errors of under-and overuse.

Izume concluded that accuracy, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation and sociolinguistic appropriateness all come to bear on learners' proficiency. This presentation was of interest to Cambridge ESOL as we are developing our own corpus of speaking tests and are interested to hear of other analyses that we may choose to do on our data in the future.

3. Lexis and Discourse

The third session described studies of specific features in learner language. The first presentation was based on children's speech so was of relevance to Cambridge ESOL's tests for children, the Cambridge Young Learners English tests.

Young Learners' Use of English

Ana Linares Garcia (Universidad Autonoma de Madrid) discussed repetition and young learners' initiations in English using pre-school EFL immersion classroom data.

She classified the repetitions she observed into a functional taxonomy:

- teacher feedback: interactional purpose
- child feedback – response to teacher regulatory: imitate teacher's utterance or own utterance
- children's spontaneous repetitions of other child's utterances
- teacher and child repetitions: response to request for clarification or self repetition of a message to reinforce it

Garcia analysed the effect of teachers' and learners' repetitions as a functional device in L2 English. The comparison of low, medium and high immersion classrooms revealed a difference in the extent and number of repetitions. This type of study will certainly have implications for teacher training and practice in L2 immersion contexts and reflects the use of English as a second language by children from an early age.

Formulating Writer Stance

Emma Dafouz (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) reported on a study that investigated how learner writers formulate their stance. The aim of this study was to distinguish EFL writing characteristics from native writer strategies and to distinguish novice writers' strategies from professional writers' strategies, making the salient point that it is not fair to compare learner essays with native professional writers' texts such as those found in newspapers.

This study focussed on interactive strategies that manage information (e.g. *It is clear that/ It is thought that*) and interactional strategies that attend to the reader's involvement in the argument through contrastive connectors (e.g. *however, yet*, *but* and *nevertheless*). Dafouz reported that EFL writers overused both interactional and interactive patterns such as *It is clear that* compared to American student writers and professional writers. The EFL writers also underused *yet* but overused the other connectors.

The study revealed major differences between both native and EFL writers and student writers and professional writers which will have an impact in training and future analysis. Although native student writers have similar characteristics to EFL writers this research implies that the idea of adopting a native writer norm requires careful treatment if an appropriate model for learners is to be established.

Basic emotional expressions in English by non-native speakers

Tomoko Kaneko (Showa Women's University, Japan) spoke about the use of negative basic emotional expressions (anger, surprise, anxiety and grief) by Japanese, Chinese and French students writing in English. She found no correlation between ability level, expressed by TOEFL scores, and the use of emotional expressions and strategies (e.g. using particular verbs, adverbs, nouns and adjectives). Although learners lacked the strategies to produce some types of emotional words they used a similar proportion of emotion words (0.13% Japanese writers) to native writers (0.05%).

The main findings of this study were that native writers exploit a variety of expressions of emotion and there are differences in the negative emotions expressed by learners according to their language background. Whereas Japanese students expressed surprise and anxiety more than Chinese or French students they expressed anger and grief less than the other two groups. Learners from all three L1s used few attributive adjectives.

This presentation provided insights into how Japanese learners use negative emotions in their writing. It would be interesting to compare these findings with those from learner and native speech in order to compare use of emotional expressions in speech versus writing. Cambridge ESOL already takes into account differences in language background and culture when developing exam materials although findings from research such as this could add to our knowledge of how different candidates communicate in English.

Elaboration patterns of NNS writers in College Essays

Sachie Karasawa (Community College of Southern Nevada) described the elaboration patterns of NNS writers in college essays at high, intermediate and low proficiency levels. She collected 61 argumentative essays and analysed various linguistic features including adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, that- and wh-clauses. She concluded that the highly scoring essays showed both a greater variety and larger number of linguistic items than the other two groups. Also, intermediate level writers seemed to elaborate more within each sentence than higher level writers. This type of detailed analysis reveals much about how learners actually write in an L2 and has implications for future studies combining textual analysis and statistical techniques.

Issues of mark-up of handwriting in a learner corpus

Harold Somers (UMIST) explored some of the issues surrounding learners' handwriting. Handwriting itself is problematic for many language learners due to the acquisition of a new writing system including different letter sizes, spacing and other conventions. The question of what is an error and what is a correction was raised and the audience looked in detail at some Arabic writers' texts in English. Somers noted that the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) guidelines were not really suitable for marking up modern handwriting and raised other salient points in his talk.

This whole area deserves more attention and it was gratifying to hear a talk on this subject at the workshop. This presentation was relevant to several aspects of Cambridge ESOL's work. Firstly, in relation to developing the CLC, the question of having to check keyers' accuracy when re-typing a candidate's answer is already being addressed as a percentage of all scripts are checked for accuracy after keying. Secondly, the question arises of when is a learner error an omission of knowledge, a hand-writing error or due to a physical or learning disability? The last issue of Research Notes focussed on the testing provisions offered to candidates with special needs, and this question must clearly be raised in relation to candidates for whom Special Arrangements are made, including the consideration of assistive technologies (see Mike Gutteridge's article on page15). The issue of handwriting or typing scripts also has implications for Electronic Script Management, as discussed in Stuart Shaw's article on page 4.

Conclusion

The workshop was drawn to a close by the organisers, Yukio Tono and Fanny Meunier who summarised the main points of the day. Firstly it was observed that Learner Corpora are no longer in their infancy but are going through their teenage years so are full of promise but not yet fully developed. Corpus linguists have to start with clear design criteria such as L1 rhetorical ability and its transfer to L2 which was raised at the workshop. Better links are needed to other communities, particularly SLA and FLT communities (and to language testers, I would add).

At the annotation level, POS tagging, parsing and error-tagging all received good coverage during the day, together with the idea of marking the correct usage alongside errors, as is already done in the CLC. Corpus analysis itself is still mostly lexical, as it is at Cambridge ESOL with our work on developing item-writer wordlists; re-visiting the notion of a lexicon and analysing the productive vocabulary of candidates at different levels. The workshop proved other types of corpus analysis can also be done including functional, discourse, pragmatic and cultural analyses.

The existence of dynamic applications of corpora was another exciting aspect of the day which included the living curriculum approach plus various multimedia and lexicographic uses. Although testing uses were not described this is an area that Cambridge ESOL will continue to address.

A special issue of the International Journal of Corpus Linguistics on learner corpora is planned which will report on some of the issues discussed at this workshop. It was very encouraging to attend this event and to hear evidence that the interest in learner corpora is growing world-wide and not just the study of learners of English. The implications of new technology for corpus linguists and for developing learner corpora are far-reaching and will encourage Cambridge ESOL to apply some of the techniques described above to our own corpora.

References and Further Reading

ALTE: http://www.alte.org/

CLAWS tagger:
http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/computing/research/ucrel/claws/

ICLE: http://www.fltr.ucl.ac.be/fltr/germ/etan/cecl/Cecl-Projects/Icle/icle.htm

International Journal of Corpus Linguistics:
http://www.benjamins.com/cgi-bin/t_seriesview.cgi?series=IJCL

TEI guidelines: http://www.tei-c.org/Guidelines2/index.html

ACTFL-ALC Press. (1996). *Standard Speaking Test interviewer kit*, ACTFL-ALC Press.

Gass, S M and Selinker, L (1994): *Second language acquisition*, Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

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Assistive Technology for Candidates with Special Needs

MIKE GUTTERIDGE, CAMBRIDGE ESOL SPECIAL NEEDS CONSULTANT

There is now a growing range of assistive technology available for use by disabled candidates in their teaching/learning environment. The existence of various types of assistive technology can have implications for disabled candidates taking examinations and at Cambridge ESOL we seek to keep abreast of new developments in this field. This article summarises seven main types of assistive technology that are currently available.

1. Voice Recognition Software

Voice recognition software is the assistive technology that most people will be familiar with due to its increasing popularity for home computer use. This type of software converts speech to text and would allow candidates to record, edit and proof responses. The candidates most likely to use such equipment would be those with manipulative problems (e.g. RSI/arthritis/arm injuries/ paraplegia/quadriplegia/blind candidates with diabetes); also candidates with brain injuries/motor impairment and those with dyslexia and other Specific Learning Difficulties.

2. Screen Reading Software

These are speech output systems that convert screen text (including menus, icons, dialogue boxes, etc) to speech. Used on a PC, software also includes a screen magnification tool for the visually impaired and can usually produce Braille output via a Braille Display/Notetaker or Embosser. Screen reading software would be used by blind or physically disabled candidates (including those with motor-impairment or cerebral palsy) who cannot focus on text well enough to read it.

3. Screen Magnifiers

Screen magnification tools for the visually impaired are used on a PC and are often combined with screen reading programs. Partially–sighted and physically disabled candidates would be the most likely to use this type of software.

4. Electronic Braille Displays

These are tactile devices placed under a conventional QWERTY keyboard to enable users to 'read' the screen via Braille 'cells' on the tactile keyboard. Blind candidates who are expert users of Braille and prefer to work in the Braille environment would be likely to use this equipment, together with the fifth type of assistive technology.

5. Braille Keyboards/Electronic Braillers/Braille Notetakers

These portable/semi-portable devices enable users to type answers in Braille, either directly into a PC, or with hard copy Braille output, via a built-in embosser and/or speech output.

6. Augmentative Speech Devices

This is free-standing/portable equipment or PC software designed to enable communication via synthesized speech. Candidates with severe speech problems or no speech at all (e.g. in cases of motor neurone disease) would be most likely to request permission to use such equipment.

7. Assistive Listening Devices

Assistive listening devices are portable/semi-portable equipment that amplify sound and might be appropriate for candidates with hearing impairment. These systems usually include microphones (which can be remote), amplifier and earphone/headphones/ speakers.

Summary

New types of assistive technology are constantly evolving and permission to use a particular device or program can only be granted if examination security is not compromised by the use of such technology. It is also important for us to ensure that disabled candidates using assistive technology are not advantaged by being able to make use of functions not available to other candidates – eg: spellcheck, or thesaurus. The issue of fairness of opportunity to all candidates (both those with and without the assistive device) continues to guide Cambridge ESOL's consideration of all requests to use assistive technology in examinations.

For further information about Special Arrangements refer to the support pages on the Cambridge ESOL website:

http://www.CambridgeESOL.org/support/

Feedback on CPE re-training

CHRIS HUBBARD, PERFORMANCE TESTING UNIT

Introduction

During the re-training of Oral Examiners for the revised CPE Speaking Test, trainees were asked to complete feedback forms. This is a brief review of the process and results. The aim of this exercise was threefold, namely:

- To assess the impact and effectiveness of the re-training of CPE Oral Examiners;
- To assess Oral Examiner reactions to some of the main features of the new Speaking Test;
- To collate Oral Examiner questions and comments arising from the re-training.

A number of those questioned expressed the feeling that it was too early to canvass examiners for their reactions. However, there are ways in which the feedback is of use. Firstly, in the production of a set of *Frequently Asked Questions* for use at future training sessions. Secondly, by identifying what areas may need specific questions directed at them in more detailed feedback gathering, and thirdly, it can highlight areas that may need to be addressed in the production of live materials. As production of these materials starts so far in advance of the live tests it is useful to get an early indication of such issues.

Process

Examiners completed a feedback form after their re-training session. The feedback form contained seven statements to which participants were asked to allocate a score of 1–4 representing:

1 – Strongly Disagree
2 – Disagree
3 – Agree
4 – Strongly Agree

The form also included a question that asked examiners to assess the success of particular tasks, and a space in which to make comments. The forms were intended to elicit reactions to the main changes to the Speaking Test format and materials and the perceived effectiveness of the training session.

Results

By the end of March 2003 a total of 806 feedback forms were received containing reactions to the statements and comments. Comments were also received from a further 174 Team Leaders and Oral Examiners on different forms, in letters and e-mails, meaning that feedback was received from a total of 980 people. The average scores for each statement are shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Average score per statement

Question	Total	Average	Rank
1. The revised Speaking Tests are an improvement on the previous tests	2585.5	3.21	6
2. The wording of the frames are easy to use	2597.5	3.22	5
3. The visual materials are clearly laid out and easy to use	2711.5	3.36	3
4. The topics are appropriate for the candidates	2513	3.12	7
5. The revised assessment criteria are easy to use	2614	3.24	4
6. *See note below**			
7. I am clear about the changes that have been made to the test	2882.5	3.58	2
8. I am confident I will be able to examine in the new format	2901.5	3.60	1

* Question 6 asked examiners to select two tasks from a list that they felt would be most successful in the revised Speaking Test.

Table 2: Comments received from Examiners

Area	Number
Part 1	32
Part 2	20
Part 3	78
Rubric/Format	117
Timing	35
Level	29
Assessment	26
Training	134
Video	37
Other	125
Total	**633**

Observations

- An average score of above 3 for all questions indicates overall agreement with the statements made and a positive view of the new CPE Speaking Test (Questions 1–5);
- There is a clear feeling that the re-training programme implemented around the world successfully prepared Oral Examiners for the new format (Questions 7 and 8);
- Examiners have clear preferences regarding Part 2 and Part 3 tasks (Question 6).

Examiners' Comments

A total of 633 comments were received and recorded. The comments have been divided into 'general' areas to which they relate. One consideration in this process is the difficulty of easily assigning comments to a grouping. This can result in some overlap between opinions expressed in different areas. Table 2 shows the groupings and number of comments received.

A *Frequently Asked Questions* document addressing the most common points raised in these comments will be available through the Team Leader system from May 2003.

Conclusion

This process has been a worthwhile exercise in terms of gathering examiner reactions and having the opportunity to gauge initial reactions to this new Speaking Test and the world-wide re-training programme.

Technology Snapshots

In this section some important uses of technology that often go on behind-the-scenes are described, covering data storage and analysis, and the use of on-line technology to reach teachers and administrators around the world.

IELTS on-line verification system

IELTS results are increasingly high-stakes as the test grows in recognition and candidature. Sophisticated security features have been built in to the IELTS Test Report Form (TRF) to maintain the security of test results. An additional feature to enable users to be totally confident about the authenticity of IELTS results is the development of an on-line results verification system. The system is currently in its final trialling stages and is due for general deployment in June 2003.

How does the system work?

Prospective users (e.g. admissions officers) apply to Cambridge ESOL for access to the system and, once approved, are provided with a password. The system is designed to verify single results only. Users are asked to enter the Test Report Form Number, unique to each TRF, and, if a match is found in the IELTS results database in Cambridge, the candidate details and scores are displayed. From 1 April 2003 all IELTS TRFs include a scanned photo of the candidate and a future development will enable the candidate's photo as well as their results to be displayed on the on-line query.

How do I find out more about the on-line verification system?

Entry to the system will be given through the IELTS website. Full information on access and use of the system will be provided on the website in early June.

The IELTS website is available at: http://www.ielts.org

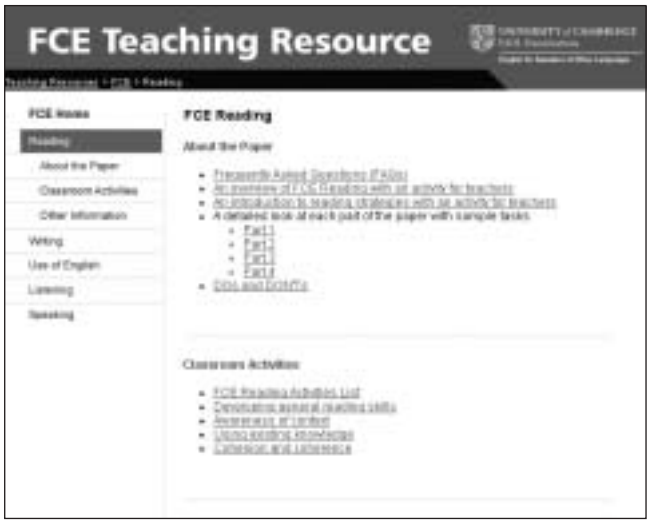
On-line Teaching Resources from Cambridge ESOL

Cambridge ESOL Teaching Resources is a new initiative to provide on-line resources for teachers who are interested in the Cambridge ESOL exams. The site includes a range of information, downloadable documents and ready-made tasks that can be used to get a better understanding of the way the Cambridge ESOL exams work and materials teachers can use to help them prepare lessons.

The FCE Resource is on-line now and offers detailed information about the exam, what is tested and how it is marked. For each of the five papers, there are three sections with different types of material, described below.

Front page

FCE Teaching Resource



FCE Reading page

About the Paper

Every part of each paper is explored in detail. There are sample materials taken from past papers and questions for teachers to help them understand the exam tasks and skills tested. For Writing and Speaking there are also extensive sections on assessment. The material is designed so that teachers can read it for themselves or use it in workshops with groups of teachers.

Classroom Activities

The activities are designed to help students learn the language skills tested in FCE. Many of the activities have specially designed worksheets and tasks adapted from past papers to encourage students to think about the English that they need to know before approaching the real exam questions.

Other Information

Here there are links to relevant information from the main Cambridge ESOL site, such as handbooks and exam reports and for the Listening and Speaking sections information is given about the cassettes or videos which can be used with the support material.

FCE is the first exam to have this on-line support, Younger Learners is due in July and the other Cambridge exams will all be covered soon.

Teaching Resources is on-line now at www.CambridgeESOL.org/teach

Small project information management using TELEform

Roumen Marinov and Jenny Jones, Research and Validation Group

The Research and Validation Group is involved in many projects that involve data handling and analysis, for example collating questionnaire responses such as those described by Chris Hubbard in relation to CPE re-training. This process has been improved by the use of TELEform, a software package for small project information management developed by Cardiff TELEform.

TELEform automates the entire process of collecting, evaluating, validating, and storing data through the use of forms. The data forms can be distributed via fax, server, printer, or the Internet, and then the system automatically evaluates the returned data. To evaluate any forms that are returned as hard copies, a scanner must be used. Forms that are returned via fax server (installed with TELEform) are captured as electronic images. After capturing the data, TELEform can automatically export the information to a database so it can immediately be used by other applications such as Access, Excel and so on.

The limitation of the previous forms for capturing information used by the Research and Validation Group was that the information returned with the forms often still had to be manually entered into a computer before it could be used.

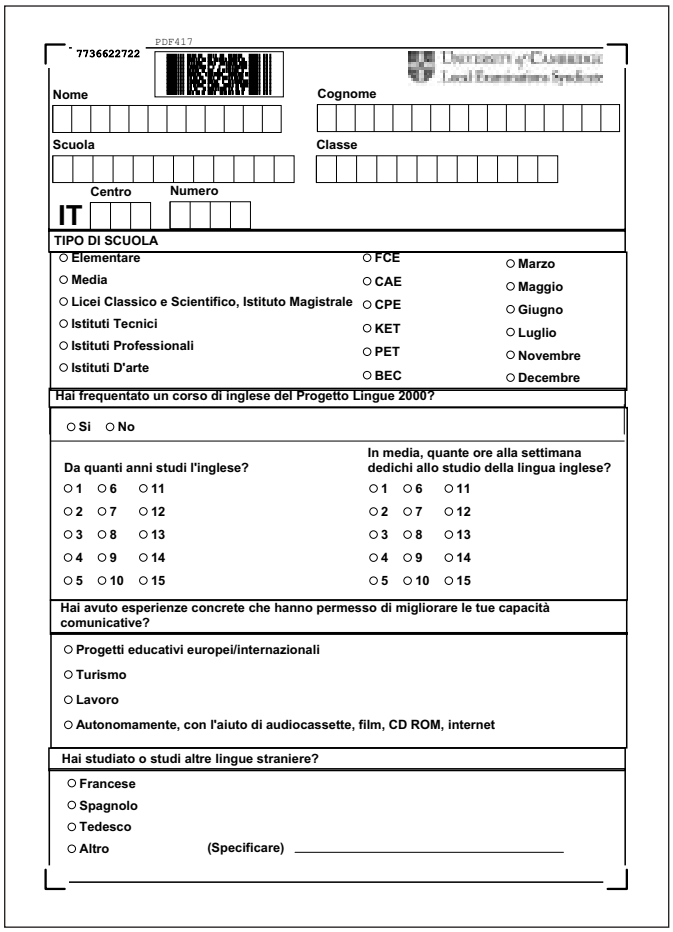
The advantage of using TELEform over the other forms of capturing information is that TELEform combines:

- Form design;
- Support for forms created in other applications;
- Hand print (ICR), machine print (OCR), mark sense (OMR), and bar code recognition;
- Form distribution.

Apart from the technological benefits described above, there are also financial benefits from using TELEform:

- The manual data entry costs are reduced and the errors associated with manual data entry are eliminated;
- The response time from setting up the project to the presentation of the information is reduced;
- The collected data is in a format that works with existing databases and Knowledge Management Systems. Two sample TELEform forms are shown below.

Since acquiring TELEform software Cambridge ESOL is in a better position to capture, store and use data for its many ongoing validation activities.



PDF417

7736622722

Nome

Cognome

Scuola

Classe

Centro

Numero

IT

TIPO DI SCUOLA

- Elementare
- Media
- Licei Classico e Scientifico, Istituto Magistrale
- Istituti Tecnici
- Istituti Professionali
- Istituti D'arte
- FCE
- CAE
- CPE
- KET
- PET
- BEC
- Marzo
- Maggio
- Giugno
- Luglio
- Novembre
- Decembre

Hai frequentato un corso di inglese del Progetto Lingue 2000?

- Si
- No

Da quanti anni studi l'inglese?

- 1 6 11
- 2 7 12
- 3 8 13
- 4 9 14
- 5 10 15

In media, quante ore alla settimana dedichi allo studio della lingua inglese?

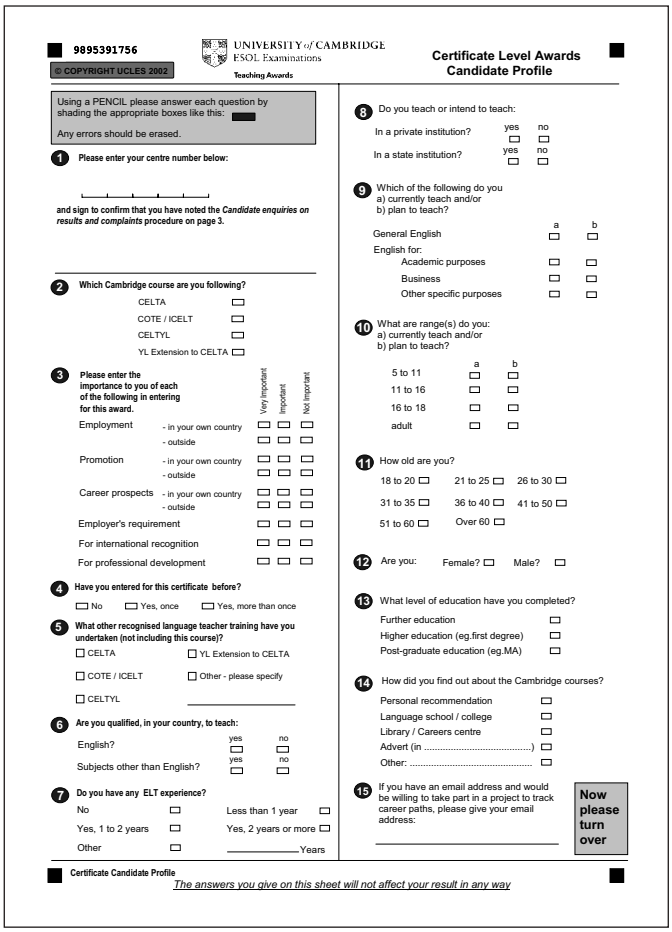
- 1 6 11
- 2 7 12
- 3 8 13
- 4 9 14
- 5 10 15

Hai avuto esperienze concrete che hanno permesso di migliorare le tue capacità comunicative?

- Progetti educativi europei/internazionali
- Turismo
- Lavoro
- Autonomamente, con l'aiuto di audiocassette, film, CD ROM, internet

Hai studiato o studi altre lingue straniere?

- Francese
- Spagnolo
- Tedesco
- Altro (Specificare) _____



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UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE ESOL Examinations

Teaching Awards

Certificate Level Awards
Candidate Profile

Using a PENCIL please answer each question by shading the appropriate boxes like this: ■

Any errors should be erased.

1 Please enter your centre number below:

and sign to confirm that you have noted the *Candidate enquiries on results and complaints* procedure on page 3.

2 Which Cambridge course are you following?

CELTA
COTE / ICELT
CELTYL
YL Extension to CELTA

3 Please enter the importance to you of each of the following in entering for this award.

		Very Important	Important	Not Important
Employment	- in your own country			
	- outside			
Promotion	- in your own country			
	- outside			
Career prospects	- in your own country			
	- outside			
Employer's requirement				
For international recognition				
For professional development				

4 Have you entered for this certificate before?

No Yes, once Yes, more than once

5 What other recognised language teacher training have you undertaken (not including this course)?

CELTA
YL Extension to CELTA
COTE / ICELT
Other - please specify
CELTYL

6 Are you qualified, in your country, to teach:

English? yes no
Subjects other than English? yes no

7 Do you have any ELT experience?

No
Less than 1 year
Yes, 1 to 2 years
Yes, 2 years or more
Other _____ Years

8 Do you teach or intend to teach:

	yes	no
In a private institution?		
In a state institution?		

9 Which of the following do you
a) currently teach and/or
b) plan to teach?

	a	b
General English		
English for:		
Academic purposes		
Business		
Other specific purposes		

10 What are range(s) do you:
a) currently teach and/or
b) plan to teach?

	a	b
5 to 11		
11 to 16		
16 to 18		
adult		

11 How old are you?

18 to 20 21 to 25 26 to 30
31 to 35 36 to 40 41 to 50
51 to 60 Over 60

12 Are you: Female? Male?

13 What level of education have you completed?

Further education
Higher education (eg.first degree)
Post-graduate education (eg.MA)

14 How did you find out about the Cambridge courses?

Personal recommendation
Language school / college
Library / Careers centre
Advert (in .....)
Other: .....

15 If you have an email address and would be willing to take part in a project to track career paths, please give your email address:

Now please turn over

Certificate Candidate Profile

The answers you give on this sheet will not affect your result in any way

Sample TELEform forms

Conference Reports

Speaking Test Research Symposium

A growing number of MA/PhD students are keen to study spoken language data produced in oral proficiency tests; fortunately, their interest sometimes coincides with our desire to understand more about our own Speaking Tests, particularly the language and behaviour of participants in the speaking test event. Two PhD students are currently investigating aspects of the FCE Speaking Test, using recorded tests provided by us under strict conditions of security and confidentiality; a third PhD student is working with us on validation studies for the IELTS Speaking Test. In February 2003 we invited all three students to take part in an internal Speaking Test Research Symposium in Cambridge; the purpose of the event was to enable them to present on their work to date and to engage with our internal staff directly involved in Speaking Test production and validation.

Lindsay Brooks (OISE, University of Toronto) is currently undertaking a PhD looking at paired interaction in classroom and testing contexts; nevertheless, she maintains a general interest in speaking assessment and has been working with us to develop an observation checklist for use in analysing task output in the IELTS Speaking Test. Lindsay reported on the first stage of this work – the development of the checklist – in *Research Notes 11*; in a future issue she will describe in more detail the results of applying the checklist to a large number of IELTS Speaking Tests and using it to provide evidence for test validation purposes.

Yang Lu (University of Reading, UK) is exploring the notion of discourse competence, first proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) and later reformulated in Bachman's (1990) model of Communicative Language Ability. Her analysis of a set of 30 FCE Speaking Tests confirms that discourse competence can justifiably be considered an independent component of a speaker's communicative competence and it provides empirical evidence for the validity of our 'discourse management' criterion and scale.

Yang Lu has also been able to demonstrate a significant relationship between the interlocutor's global rating of test-taker performance and the discourse management/interactive communication ratings. This suggests the interlocutor may be taking a discourse- (rather than linguistic-) focused perspective in the test. For more details of Yang Lu's study, see her article on the pilot phase in *Research Notes 11*; a follow-up article on the main study will appear in *Research Notes* later this year.

Evelina Dimitrova-Galaczi (Teachers College, Columbia University, New York) is investigating the nature of paired interaction in the context of the FCE Speaking Test, Task 3 (two-way collaborative task). Evelina transcribed cassette recordings of 30 paired FCE Speaking Tests (provided by us) in order to look closely at the interactional patterns of the paired candidates and at how these patterns relate to candidate scores on the 'interactive communication' scale. The data sample was well-balanced in terms of L1, gender, and score range. She analysed the spoken language data both qualitatively and quantitatively in terms of each candidate's:

- *interactional contingency* (e.g. reacting to previous turn, creating shared meaning);
- *goal orientation* (e.g. developing the topic over longer stretches, pushing the task forward);
- *conversational dominance* (e.g. floor-holding, interruption, initiating new topic).

Evelina was able to discern three distinct patterns of interaction which occurred within candidate pairings in FCE Task 3: *collaborative, competitive,* and *dominant/passive*. Interestingly, *collaborative* candidates tended on balance to score more highly (4–5) on the 'interactive communication' scale while *competitive* candidates tended to score less highly (3–4). The incidence of *dominant/passive* (or asymmetrical) pairings was 10%.

Evelina's study is significant in that it offers us valuable insights into the collaborative task in FCE. It highlights salient features of the interaction which are important from a discourse perspective and points to scenarios when the interlocutor may need to exercise greater control in order to redress variability in the peer-peer interaction phase. It also enables us to gain a better understanding of the construct of conversation management and so design successful collaborative tasks for FCE. In relation to FCE assessment criteria and rating scale construction, the study helps us understand the relationship between task, language output and scores; it also provides justification for current terms in the FCE band descriptors (*flow of language, hesitations, sensitivity to turn-taking*) and suggests additional terms which may be helpful in describing interactional skills (*listener support, speaker selection, topic continuity/decay*). Clearly this can have implications for training FCE oral examiners to make accurate assessments of candidate output. Finally, Evelina's transcript analysis provides clear empirical evidence for claims about the authentic quality of test-taker talk in the FCE Speaking Test.

A fuller description of Evelina's study will appear in *Research Notes 13* (August 2003).

This symposium brought new researchers into direct contact with Cambridge ESOL staff involved in developing the examinations which they are researching. It was an informative and enjoyable day and will feed into future research projects. Cambridge ESOL often maintains contact with research students beyond their studies as they are the future of language testing research. External researchers with an interest in IELTS might like to consider applying for funding through the funded research programme (see page 22).

BALEAP Professional Issues Meeting

On 15 February, 2003, BALEAP (British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes) held a one day Professional Issues meeting at the University of Warwick. The meeting was on the teaching of vocabulary to EAP students.

Richard Cauldwell started the day off with a talk called 'Vocabulary in the Acoustic Blur of Speech – the Problems for Listening'. This talk was about the difficulties learners of English have in working out where the breaks between words come in spoken language. He talked about his new course, *Streaming Speech*, which comes in the form of a CD for advanced learners of English, and which has eight chapters which focus on different aspects of speech. For example, there are chapters on short and long vowels, and on clusters of high and low pitch words. The CD is based on eight speakers who speak naturally at various speeds about their work and educational experiences; and there is a male speaker who speaks the relevant phrases unnaturally slowly with each word clearly distinguished from its neighbours, so that learners can compare their own production and that of the slow-speaking male with the production of the original speakers. Essentially the course teaches advanced students what to listen to in spoken discourse.

David Oakey (University of Birmingham) talked about identifying frequent word combinations for students of economics and Jim Milton (University of Wales, Swansea) spoke about lexical profiling and learning strategies. Paul Fanning (Middlesex University) gave us examples of words that the sophisticated speaker could replace with grammatical expressions including negatives, passives and relative clauses. An example he gave was: 'surprising' which can be replaced by a grammatical expression starting 'Although ….' or 'However, …'.

Sandra Haywood (University of Nottingham) talked about something which was 'flavour of the month' in that all the other speakers referred to it. This was the 'Academic Word List' produced by Averil Coxhead. Sandra Haywood finds this list much more useful than its predecessor, the University Word List. It has approximately 87 word families, and it does not list any vocabulary that is specific to a particular discipline; it lists words which have a specific academic meaning and are necessary for EAP teaching. For example, the word 'Factor' appears and includes

'Factoring' and 'Factorise' in its 'family'. Sandra Haywood has written a computer program to identify the words in difficult texts which are listed in the AWL, and she gives her students examples of such words in actual use. For this she uses a corpus such as COBUILD.

The last talk of the day was one by Richard Hall (University of Birmingham) and Hilary Nesi (University of Warwick). They based their talk on some research they had done on MA students in Birmingham attending pre-sessional English classes. For a class assignment, the students were asked to provide a text and to list five words that they did not know. The students had to look these words up in a dictionary, quote the most appropriate meaning and say whether the dictionary definition made sense in the context. What was worrying was that some of the students chose the wrong meaning, and yet felt the definition did make sense.

This meeting raised cogent issues for teachers, researchers and testers with an interest in academic vocabulary. Cambridge ESOL is currently addressing some of the issues relating to word lists, by studying the productive vocabulary of test takers at all levels and attempting to define different types of vocabulary such as general and business English.

For further information please see:

Academic Wordlist: http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/div1/awl/awlinfo.html

BALEAP: http://www.baleap.org.uk/

COBUILD: http://www.cobuild.collins.co.uk/

Streaming Speech: http://www.speechinaction.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/

Other News

Cambridge ESOL Seminars

The Cambridge ESOL seminar programme provides support for teachers. Typically for each exam there is an introductory seminar followed by other sessions on specific skills. The seminar materials are designed for a three-hour session, but can be adapted to meet local needs.

Seminars contain information about the exams and data on candidate performance as well as providing an opportunity for teachers to explore the implications for classroom practice. Besides supporting teachers, seminars raise the profile of centres in the local community, provide training for centre staff and help to develop and maintain links with supplier schools. They can also be used to promote specific exams to target groups.

For more information registered users can follow the 'Professional Support' link on CentreNET.

CentreNet

Well over half of all Cambridge ESOL centres are now using CentreNet, and the remaining Local Secretaries are being encouraged to register with this service.

An increasing number of Cambridge ESOL's services are only available via CentreNet, and centres will lose out on a lot of valuable information if they do not register and use the site regularly.

Research Notes Offprints

Due to demand, Cambridge ESOL is preparing offprints of previous *Research Notes* articles. Individual articles from all previous issues will shortly be made available to download from the *Research Notes* website as well as complete issues. Themed packs of offprints are also being prepared for distribution at conferences and other events. A list of offprints will appear on the website and in issue 13 of *Research Notes*.

If readers have any other comments on the content or format of *Research Notes* please contact us via the website: http://www.cambridgeesol.org/rs_notes/inform.cfm

IELTS joint-funded research 2003/4 (Round 9): call for proposals

All IELTS-related research activities are co-ordinated as part of a coherent framework for research and validation. Activities are divided into areas which are the direct responsibility of Cambridge ESOL, and work which is funded and supported by IELTS Australia and the British Council.

As part of their ongoing commitment to IELTS-related validation and research, IELTS Australia and the British Council are once again making available funding for research projects in 2003/4. For several years now the two partners have issued a joint call for research proposals that reflect current concerns and issues relating to the IELTS test in the international context. A full list of funded research studies conducted between 1995 and 2001 appeared in *Research Notes 8* (May 2002). Such research makes an important contribution to the monitoring and test development process for IELTS; it also helps IELTS stakeholders (e.g. English language professionals and teachers) to develop a greater understanding of the test.

All IELTS research is managed by a Research Committee which agrees research priorities and oversees the tendering process. In determining the quality of the proposals and the research carried out, the Committee may call on a panel of external reviewers. The Committee also oversees the publication and/or presentation of research findings.

What areas of interest have been identified?

At a recent meeting, the IELTS Research Committee identified the following as among the areas of interest for research purposes:

- work relating to the revised IELTS Speaking Test (e.g. study of examiner/candidate discourse across the different test parts, study of examiner/candidate attitudes to the revised format/assessment);
- work relating to the range of tests now used for university/college entry in Australia/New Zealand/UK/Canada, including methods/criteria used by university admissions staff and faculty heads when deciding acceptable English language thresholds for their courses;
- work relating to IELTS and test impact (e.g. a study of the IELTS preparation courses and teaching/learning materials, as well as an investigation of current understanding of the test among IELTS stakeholders and how this is/can be developed);
- work relating to band score gain and intensive English language training, including the recommended language threshold below which students should not attempt an IELTS test;
- work on other issues of current interest in relation to IELTS.

A list of funded projects in progress can be found on the IELTS website – www.ielts.org

Is access to IELTS test materials or score data possible?

Access to IELTS test materials or score data is not normally possible for a variety of reasons, e.g. test security, data confidentiality. However, sometimes a limited amount of retired material (e.g. writing test prompts) may be made available for research purposes. In addition, Cambridge ESOL has been engaging over recent years in the development of instruments and procedures designed to investigate the impact of IELTS; it is possible that these may be made available for use by researchers following consultation with Cambridge ESOL (more details are given in the *IELTS Annual Review 2001/2002*).

Who may submit proposals?

As part of the IELTS policy of stimulating test-related research among its stakeholders, it is hoped that many of the research proposals submitted this year will come from researchers and organisations who have a direct and ongoing connection with IELTS, e.g. consultants, Senior Examiners, IELTS Administration Centres and centres which have assisted in trialling IELTS. There is, however, no objection to proposals being submitted by other groups/centres/individuals.

What is the level and duration of funding available?

The maximum amount of funding which will be made available for any one proposal is £13,000/AUS$30,000. The research study will need to be completed and a full report submitted by the end of December 2004.

What is the procedure for submitting proposals?

Application forms and guidelines for submission (together with terms and conditions) are available from the British Council and IELTS Australia – see below for contact details. Proposals for funding should take the form of a typed/word-processed document of no more than 10 pages, and be accompanied by the completed application forms.

Who will evaluate the proposals?

All research proposals will be evaluated by the IELTS Research Committee comprising representatives of the three IELTS partners as well as other academic experts in the field of applied linguistics and language testing.

What criteria will be used to evaluate proposals?

The following factors will be taken into consideration when evaluating proposals:

- Relevance and benefit of outcomes to IELTS
- Clarity and coherence of proposal's rationale, objectives and methodology
- Feasibility of outcomes, timelines and budget (including ability to keep to deadlines)
- Qualifications and experience of proposed project staff
- Potential of the project to be reported in a form which would be both useful to IELTS and of interest to an international audience

What is the time scale for the submission and evaluation of proposals?

The following time scale will apply for Round 9:

May 2003	Call for proposals
31 July 2003	Deadline for submission of proposals
August/September 2003	Preliminary review of proposals by IELTS partners
October/November 2003	Meeting of IELTS Research Committee to evaluate and select successful proposals
December 2003	Applicants notified of the IELTS Research Committee's decision

Application forms and submission guidelines are available from:

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Program Manager
Testing Services
IELTS Australia
IDP Education Australia
GPO Box 2006
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ACT 2601
Australia
Tel: 61 6 285 8222
Fax: 61 6 285 3233
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Sujata.Saikia@britishcouncil.org

CELTA tracking impact project – can you help?

What happens to English language teachers after their initial training course? Where do they go, who do they work for and how long do they stay? Is it possible to identify a typical career path or paths and what does this tell us about the appropriateness of the CELTA qualification?

One of the routine validation activities for all Cambridge ESOL exams is an attempt to find out what impact a particular exam has on the career development of individual candidates and on the EFL community in general. The Research and Validation Group at Cambridge ESOL has set up a project to track teachers who've taken the CELTA course; what kind of jobs they have at what kind of schools and institutions, particularly in the first two years, and how their career paths develop subsequently. This will feed back into our continuing evaluation of the assessment as a whole and will help inform the future development of the CELTA and other Cambridge English Language Teaching awards.

As well as a printed questionnaire which has been sent to all CELTA and DELTA centres, we've set up an on-line version which takes a few minutes to fill in and sends the data back directly to us as an e-mail. The project has a two-year lifespan in the first instance, and we plan to collect some longitudinal data as well as 'snapshot' responses; it's relatively easy to contact teachers while they're on the CELTA course, but as soon as they start teaching it's much harder to keep track of them. Therefore we will be re-contacting respondents who agree to help our research after six months or one year to find out what's happened to them and how their views on the CELTA initial qualification have evolved.

We'd welcome anyone who has taken the CELTA course, at any time in the past, to take part by completing the questionnaire. The on-line version is at:

http://www.cambridgeesol.org/teaching/celta_tracking.cfm

We'd be very grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete and submit it electronically. Your views will be very helpful to Cambridge ESOL.