The EALTA Special Interest Groups for

The Assessment of Writing
&
Assessment for Academic Purposes

Event Programme

Thursday, May 31st, 2012, University of Innsbruck

Event Programme

13.30-13.35
Peter Holt SIG for Academic Purposes Coordinator: *Welcome and introduction*

13.35-14.15
Anika Müller/Sonja Zimmermann, TestDaF Institute, University of Bochum, Germany: *Is there academic writing without reading? - Results from a needs analysis*

The process of establishing test validity is one of the basic concerns in language testing. Therefore, it is necessary to gather and evaluate evidence for the validity of a test in as many ways as possible. One approach examines to what extent test tasks are representative of the target language use beyond the test itself. This also includes the cognitive processes involved (Weir 2005, Shaw and Weir 2007). Regarding the TestDaF, the Test of German as a Foreign Language, this implies taking a closer look at specific features of reading and writing in higher education: In which situations are students required to read and write? What kind of texts does this typically involve? The paper presents first results of a needs analysis and wants to discuss the integration of relevant characteristics of academic writing into a language test.

14.15-14.45
Linda Nepivodová, Masaryk University of Brno, The Czech Republic: *Comparing two modes of test administration*

This study explores certain Language Examinations, administered by the Department of English and American Studies at the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, Brno. These compulsory examinations are taken by students at the end of their first, second and third years and serve as prerequisites to their further studies in the Department. The examinations measure proficiency of the students at advanced and proficient levels of English. Recently, computer-based versions of the Language Examinations have been implemented. The main purpose of this study is to compare and contrast the pencil and paper and the computer-based versions of the above mentioned Language Examinations. It will attempt to identify possible differences in the two modes of administration. This study also aims to draw on the research carried out as part of my Master's thesis which showed that the two different modes of administration (P&P and CB) brought about differences in student performance, especially as far as reading and listening skills were concerned, and the students generally preferred the P& P version to the CB version. It would therefore be beneficial to expand on my previous research and also find out if/how the situation and the students' opinions towards computerized testing have changed since 2006

14.45-15.25
Carolyn Westbrook, Southampton Solent University, UK/Peter Holt, Sabancı University, Istanbul, Turkey: *Addressing the Problem of "Excessive Assistance" in Assessed EAP Writing*

While plagiarism detection software such as Turn-it-in helps to detect instances of plagiarism in students' "take home" writing assignments, it does not address another concern related to academic honesty; that of "excessive assistance", where a student may receive help with their work from a peer, family member or inadvertently from their tutor. One common response to this problem is to assess writing under exam conditions with a task requiring little or no recourse to supporting text. By taking this approach, however, a degree of task authenticity (and therefore test validity) is surrendered because academic writing in most instances is dependent on much longer texts, usually in the form of articles, chapters or whole books. The first part of our presentation will outline an "open book" exam task which features the extensive reading component of an academic writing assignment but, through its task design, also significantly reduces the likelihood of excessive assistance. Because the open book exam task seems to encourage the test taker to read the related texts in detail, the second part of our presentation will report the findings of a recent mini-research project which investigated the possible relationship between text familiarity and the degree of plagiarism in test takers' written responses.

15.25-15.35 Break

15.35-16.15
Aylin Unaldi, Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey
Construct operationalisation and test taking strategies in EAP tests of reading: The case of search reading, careful reading at local and intertextual levels

Probing into the cognitive processes underlying test responses provides substantial validity evidence in terms of the construct operationalised in test items. This study aims at presenting a methodological analysis of the cognitive operations used in response to three types of reading items in order to provide construct-related evidence. While the results supported the successful operationalisation of the reading skills, it also showed that construct-irrelevant variance might creep in test procedures when test takers utilise unexpected test taking strategies.

16.15-16.55
Jonathan Rees and Els Van Geyte, University of Birmingham, UK: *Developing a 'quick and effective' tool for identifying deficit in academic writing skills for university students*

This presentation is intended to focus attention on the growing need within the U.K. Higher Education sector to develop assessments which can be used for academic writing (AW) training selection purposes for both home and international students. It is intended to outline the logistical restrictions involved in the development of such assessments and to provoke thinking towards practical solutions (hopefully from the audience!).
To this end, the presentation draws on data from an ongoing research project at the University of Birmingham aimed at developing tools for the selection of undergraduate Biosciences students (home and international) for academic writing training. It describes the construction of an experimental test for assessing academic writing skills and provides examples of items from the five pilot sub-tests. Statistics and performance data are then given from the first administration of the test to a sample of undergraduate Biosciences students (n=230) and to a much smaller sample of postgraduate Biosciences students (n= 12). Examples of student responses (some of real academic interest, some of great entertainment value) are then presented. Findings are also given from a 'self-assessment' questionnaire, investigating student perceptions of their own academic writing competence and their need for academic writing training.

The paper concludes by raising a series of questions:

1) Is it possible to construct an assessment tool for selecting students for AW training given the logistical restrictions within the university context?
2) What are the most revealing individual features of AW for general competence assessment purposes?
3) What should be the next development stage for the test employed in the project?

16.55-17.30
Question Box *The discussion is open to questions, stimulated either by the presentations or by your own context. Participants will be invited to submit questions during the break. We'll get through as many as possible in the time available.*

<center>17.00 - 19.00 Conference registration</center>

<center>19.00   EALTA 2012 Reception</center>