Investigating the washback of a standardized examination on classroom assessment

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Overview

• Background
• Research Question
• Washback
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Background

• CEFR-linked syllabus introduced 2004
  – 4 language skills
• reformed school-leaving exam „Matura“
  – operating in pilot phase since 2008 (voluntary)
  – obligatory as of 2014 in general schools
  – professionally developed, standardized tasks
  – Listening, Reading, Language in Use, Writing
  – CEFR level B2 (English)
Research Question

• What is the washback of the standardized Matura for English in Austria on how reading is assessed in Schularbeiten?

(Schularbeiten = summative classroom-based tests)
Washback

“the extent to which the introduction and use of a test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit learning”

Messick, 1996, p. 241
Washback

changes in educational matters such as:

• curriculum
• teaching methods
• teaching and learning strategies
• material and courseware
• assessment practices
• content of instruction

Shohamy, 1999, p. 711
Washback research

• until 1990s, general education research
• since 1993 (Alderson & Wall) in the field of language testing
  – a number of evidence-based studies
  – wide range of countries and contexts
  – washback on:
    • teaching
    • learning
    • teaching materials
Washback of standardized tests on classroom-based assessment

- few studies
- general education literature (e.g., Maths, English)
- triggered by No Child Left Behind Act (USA)
Washback of standardized tests on classroom-based assessment results

• more time spent on classroom-based assessment (Stecher et al., 1998)

• teachers mirrored task types of standardized assessment
  (Mabry et al, 2003, McMillan et al., 1999; Stecher et al., 1998; Abrams et al., 2003; Mertler, 2010)

• mediating factors:
  – teachers‘ assessment literacy (Tierney, 2006)
  – stakes of the standardized test (Abrams et al., 2003)
Washback of standardized tests on classroom-based assessment

• methods used
  – surveys
  – Interviews

→ self-report data
Washback of standardized tests on classroom-based assessment

language education and language testing

• limited influence (Wesdorp, 1982)

• both negative and positive washback (Wall and Alderson, 1993)
  – stopped to test skills which were not part of the exam
  – more attention to skills which were part of the exam
  – same item types as in the exam
  – copied from past papers
Research Question

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Phase 1

• How do Grade 12 Schularbeiten tasks for reading administered before the introduction of the new Matura differ from tasks administered afterwards?
• Can any differences be attributed to the influence of the new Matura exam?
Hypotheses

• reading tasks in Schularbeiten constructed after the introduction of the new Matura (2008) will:
  – differ from those constructed before
  – show influence from Matura tasks in terms of
    • text characteristics
    • Task/item characteristics
  – include tasks from the new Matura (past papers)
Methodology

• analysis of reading tasks in Schularbeiten
  – pre 2008
  – post 2008
  – Grade 12 (year when students take the Matura)

• analysis of standardized Matura tasks

• specially designed task analysis instrument: *Reading Task Analysis Instrument*
Participants

• 130 teachers → 20 so far
  – using the new Matura
  – not using the new Matura (yet)
  – different backgrounds (questionnaire)

• raters
  – me
  – two other persons
    • from within SRP project
    • external
Development of the instrument

sources
• SRP test specifications for reading
• CEFR
• Dutch CEFR Grid
• ALTE task analysis checklists
• IATM (Instrument for Analysis of Textbook Materials; Bonkowski, 1996)
• reading literature
• coursebook material evaluation literature
Sections of the instrument

• General
• Text
• Task
• Item
General

• ID
• year
Text

- Domain
- Topic
- Writer’s intention
- Authenticity
- Nature of content
- Register
- Grammar

- Number of words
- Vocabulary profile
- Coh-Metrix measures
Task

- item type
- reading behaviour tested
- rubric
- example
- sequence of items
- layout
Items

• clarity
• paraphrased
• quality of distracters
• expected response
  – formulation
  – location
• other linguistic skills tested
• non-linguistic skills tested
• specialist knowledge tested
• cultural knowledge tested
Response format

selected response

Domain
• Personal
• Public
• Occupational
• Educational

Likert scales

Grammar
• only simple structures
• mainly simple structures
• limited range of complex structures
• wide range of complex structures
Next steps Phase 1

Pilot
• part of the data
→ revision of the instrument
Phase 2

- approaches / strategies teachers follow
- construct or select reading tasks for Schularbeiten
- link to the standardized Matura exam?

→ interviews

→ coding analysis (CAQDAS)
Phase 3

• teachers’ beliefs
• extent/ways the standardized Matura has (not) influenced
• the way they assess reading in Schularbeiten

→ questionnaire
→ statistical analysis
Contribution

• washback of the Austrian exam reform
• on classroom assessment in a foreign language
• combine analysis of artefacts with self-report data
Implications

• recommendations
  – reinforce positive washback
  – prevent negative washback

• teacher training
  – in-service
  – pre-service
References


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