XIX Seminario AICLU

PROVE DI ACCERTAMENTO E DI CERTIFICAZIONE LINGUISTICA

Book of abstracts

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*"How do you rate?" Group development work on oral interviews in
English exemption tests at the University of Helsinki*
Fergal Bradley and Sandro John Amendolara
(University of Helsinki)

Exemption testing constitutes a small but significant element of teachers' workloads at the University of Helsinki Language Centre. Offering exemption from compulsory courses responds to student needs as they increasingly acquire the required English level outside language classrooms, both informally and non-formally. With this in mind, a portfolio testing system was introduced in 2010-2011 in several faculties and, even though generally considered an improvement on previous systems, we are conducting an exemption testing project in order to examine and develop our current practices. This presentation focuses on our work on the assessment of oral skills, which is almost exclusively based on interview-style tests.

Our work on the assessment of oral skills included teachers participating in a workshop with a pre-workshop task. The aims were to share assessment practices and procedures and to work toward greater standardisation in both rating and testing focus. The task consisted of a reflection on interview and oral assessment experience and / or assessment of an exemption test interview. In the workshop, the teachers were asked, in groups, to rate student performance in an exemption test and to make explicit the processes used to reach their decision. They also used CEFR oral assessment grids to express their ratings and discussed the grids' usefulness. Each group produced a poster visualizing their ratings and processes.

In the presentation, we present the groups' findings and examine the workshop in the context of our exemption testing project. The group rating task revealed a high degree of consensus on CEFR levels, despite some variation in assessment focuses. We also discuss the benefits of this workshop activity and identify future directions for the development of oral testing at our Language Centre.

Oxford Test of English
Anthony Calanducci

What does the 21st Century hold for language assessment? Moore's law has shown that, over the history of computing, the power of computers doubles approximately every two years. This exponential growth has driven technological advances which now make online adaptive testing, once no more than a pipe dream, a reality available to all. In this session, we'll be tracing the development of adaptive testing from both theoretical and practical perspectives, examining the benefits offered by such tests, and peeking into what the future may hold. We will specifically be looking at OUP's new high quality online general proficiency test.

Are the CEFR levels appropriate to language testing in the process of internationalisation
Caroline Clark
(University of Padova)

My English is OK, but why can't I pass the exam? This is becoming a regular comment from students who find that their communication skills are more than adequate in most situations they encounter, yet they having difficulty passing the B1/B2 levels of CEFR exams.
This paper considers whether the implementation of the CEFR levels continue to be appropriate for testing students as Italian universities shift towards internationalisation and students are more likely to encounter interlocutors who are likewise non-native speakers (NNS) of English.
The aim is to discuss the question from the points of view of the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in academic situations and, in the case of the University of Padova, a research project being undertaken by the CLA – Learning English for Academic Purposes (LEAP). The paper will concentrate in particular on the changes currently taking place in Italian universities (including the proliferation of courses being offered entirely in English), the concept of world englishes, student mobility programs and the emerging reality of students needing English to communicate with non-native speakers (NNS) of English rather than native speakers.
The situation is currently evolving, and this paper intends to raise some questions. Yet there are no clear answers to the questions nor are there clear pathways to follow at the moment.

Placement that works: Designing an accurate CEFR-compliant online Italian L2 placement test with international applications
Daniela Forapani
(Capo Settore Abilita' Linguistiche – University of Parma)

Placement tests are designed to measure students? L2 knowledge in order to place them into an appropriate language course and to guarantee a standard level of ability within classes. These tests may be based on the syllabus adopted by the institution or on unrelated material. Because the University of Parma language courses are structured in line with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), the first version of the online test developed by its Language Centre may be

productively compared to the L2 Italian Syllabus (Lo Duca, 2006), the Certificate in Italian as a Foreign Language of the University of Foreigners of Siena (CILS, 2009) and the Progetto Lingua Italiana Dante Alighieri (PLIDA, 2004), which divide linguistic content (tasks and texts, linguistic functions, form, structure and meaning) into six levels ranging from A1 (Beginner) to C2 (Proficiency). After the publication of the Profilo della lingua italiana (Spinelli & Parizzi, 2010), which represents the official CEFR syllabus for Italian, and the ?Toolkit? for CEFR examinations produced by the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), the Parma placement test has been completely revised. The panel responsible for the new version made significant changes to both the format and the tagging system of the items.

This paper sets out guidelines that writers and editors can refer to while designing CEFR-compliant test items, including: a) a list of the technical specifications (number of sections required in the test, number of items per section, types of abilities that have to be tested, features of the linguistic elements that must be included); b) a checklist to ensure that test items correspond to CEFR levels; and c) methods to assess the reliability of the test and ensure its overall validity. As the Parma online placement test has been used by both the University of Zagreb (Croatia) and the University Falun (Sweden), the international impact of this model will also be investigated.

Testing teachers' ability to use CLIL methodology
Margaret Fowler
(Director of Examinations for British Council Italy)

British Council Italy has been running CLIL teacher training courses for three years and over 500 teachers of various subjects have followed them. Each of them has been given a British Council CLIL course attendance certificate and has sat the Cambridge TKT CLIL exam . The TKT CLIL exam tests teachers' knowledge of the terminology of CLIL and associated theories and techniques but to be a really valid test of a teacher's ability to operate effectively using CLIL methodology, there needs to be some assessment of their practical classroom skills. This seminar looks at the TKT CLIL and the TKT Practical exams and how they can be used as a *prova di accertamento* at the end of CLIL courses being run at Italian universities.

La certificazione delle competenze in italiano L2 presso il Centro linguistico dell'Università di Firenze
Elisabetta Jafrancesco
(Centro Linguistico di Ateneo – University of Firenze)

L'intervento che si propone al XIX Seminario AICLU, dedicato alle "Prove di accertamento e di certificazione linguistica", focalizza l'attenzione sulle prove di conoscenza linguistica messe a punto dalla Sezione di Italiano di per stranieri del Centro linguistico dell'Università di Firenze, volte a verificare le competenze linguistico-comunicative in italiano L2 degli studenti stranieri presenti nell'ateneo fiorentino e finalizzate al rilascio dei certificati di conoscenza linguistica.

La comunicazione intende presentare sinteticamente i formati delle prove messi a punto per i vari livelli di competenza e focalizza l'attenzione, in particolare, sulle problematiche inerenti la

preparazione delle prove per la valutazione della comprensione orale, della comprensione scritta e della competenza linguistica in test rivolti ad apprendenti di Livello B1 e B2 del *Quadro comune europeo di riferimento* (QCER) (Council of Europe 2001/2002), la maggioranza dei quali ha usufruito della formazione linguistica offerta dal Centro.

I test di verifica realizzati all'interno della Sezione di Italiano di per stranieri si collocano all'interno di procedure per la verifica e la valutazione delle competenze linguistico-comunicative degli studenti condivise da tutti i docenti, vale a dire non solo da quanti si occupano dell'insegnamento dell'italiano L2, ma dall'intero corpo insegnanti del Centro linguistico, che ha individuato nel tempo, in materia di *Language Testing*, linee guida condivise, attraverso costanti momenti di riflessione comune.

La riflessione condotta nella Sezione di Italiano per stranieri, coerentemente con le indicazioni del Consiglio d'Europa, si è occupata *in primis* di interpretare il modello di competenza proposto nel QCER in relazione allo specifico contesto di riferimento. In particolare, tenendo conto delle caratteristiche del pubblico che afferisce al Centro linguistico dell'Università di Firenze, costituito principalmente da studenti stranieri universitari, conoscere l'italiano, significa possedere quel tipo di competenza che consente loro non solo di gestire gli usi comuni della lingua, cioè di comunicare in situazioni abituali nel contesto del nostro Paese, ma di gestire anche gli usi tecnico-specialistici della lingua, caratteristici dell'ambito accademico in cui gli apprendenti si muovono e agiscono linguisticamente.

A partire da tali presupposti, coerentemente con le indicazioni del Consiglio d'Europa, la riflessione si è incentrata da un lato sui criteri per la selezione dei testi, quali, per esempio, la tipologia e il genere testuale, la complessità linguistica, lunghezza dei testi, la rilevanza per gli apprendenti ecc.; dall'altro sulla realizzazione delle prove stesse, soprattutto in termini di tecniche utilizzate, con l'intento generale di produrre test coerenti con gli obiettivi, che rispondano a criteri di validità, affidabilità ed economia della realizzazione, anche attraverso l'esame critico dei test realizzati e somministrati in passate sessioni d'esame, al fine di individuarne le criticità.

What we think of tests: a critical evaluation
Jan Robinson
(University of Calabria)

In a time when testing is coming increasingly under scrutiny (for example, Paran and Sercu, 2010) it becomes more important to get a clear idea of how testing affects teachers and what attitudes and beliefs they have on the subject with an aim of trying to see if they are critically aware of what they are doing.

The literature on testing refers to aspects that we must bear in mind when preparing methods of evaluation in the EFL field, such as validity, reliability, authenticity, criteria to be used as well as a test being user and marker friendly. Some people involved in testing refer to the literature, while others do not. This work investigated three different groups of people involved in EFL in the south of Italy: a group of secondary school teachers, a group of aspiring secondary school teachers and a group of people working in an Italian university and who deal with testing during their work. A questionnaire was used to try to elicit the attitudes and beliefs of people in these groups concerning this problem of evaluation. This was done by having the people involved answering questions concerning the types of test they use, their reasons for using them and their assessment of tests they are familiar with. They were also asked to critically reflect on what they do as test practitioners.

This presentation will show the results of this research and discuss some of the conclusions that can be drawn from it.

Assessing the legal English skills of Italian lawyers in a perspective of lifelong learning.
The EFLIT end-of-course exam
Anila R. Scott-Monkhouse
(Centro Linguistico - University di Parma)

In 2006 the Faculty of Law of the University of Parma (Italy) launched a postgraduate training project called EFLIT (English for Law and International Transactions) with the aim of offering professionals and graduates in the fields of Law and Economics a course combining a linguistic focus (i.e. English for Law, at B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference) and a content focus (i.e. Law in English) in order to improve both their language and legal skills. Since then EFLIT has developed into a national project and has obtained recognition by professional associations for accreditation purposes in continuous education. This has called for a valid, reliable, standardised end-of-course test which assesses the level reached by participants and is 'authentic', i.e. reflects their real needs for English and translates their competence into actual performance. Participants are encouraged to aim for internationally recognised certificates designed by accredited testers, but are too often intimidated by the level required, the format of the exam, and the perception that it does not really meet their needs. EFLIT teaching staff carried out an online survey in order to identify their specific requirements and expectations by creating an EFLIT participant profile, with the final objective of designing an exam suitable for both lawyers and accountants, and tailored to the needs of professionals working in Italy. The present study outlines a new format of the final exam based on the results of the survey, in an attempt to bring together language assessment principles and the professional needs of participants.

Assessing undergraduate students in English for specific purposes: two new initiatives
Alice Spencer and Adriana Damascelli
(Centro Linguistico Interfacoltà per le Facoltà Umanistiche – University of Torino)

The present paper will describe the assessment procedures adopted at the Turin University language centre for two undergraduate courses in ESP: the first for students following a three year degree course in social work, the second for students on a five year programme in primary education.
As well as being ESP courses, both courses can be said to contain elements of the CLIL approach. As they study texts and listen to documentaries discussing the social services in the UK, the trainee social workers learn about the social services in Britain and are continually invited to compare the Italian and British systems, considering whether specific legislations, institutions, procedures and professional roles have direct equivalents (and therefore direct translations) in the Italian system (and language). The trainee primary teachers are encouraged to continually think about teaching the language at the same time as they are learning it. Reading and listening materials all either deal directly with pedagogical / didactic issues or constitute materials (stories, films, songs, exercises, articles, etc.) which the students might use at a later date in their own classrooms.
Student assessment for both courses takes the form of a computer-based test developed at the language centre using Testmaker software, plus the evaluation of an oral presentation which the

students prepare using Powerpoint. The computer-based test consists in a reading comprehension and cloze test, two listening exercises (one comprehension and one gap fill), and ten multiple choice "Use of English" questions. All of the reading and listening material is adapted from authentic texts belonging to the sector in question. For the oral part of the assessment, the trainee primary teachers present a taught activity for use with their students (e.g. a CLIL lesson), while the social work students describe a professional experience, a work placement or an issue of particular interest for them in their own sector. The present paper will discuss the main advantages of this assessment approach, considering its fairness, appropriateness, motivational efficacy and practical efficiency.

CLIL assessment test and international programmes
Maria Grazia Tornabene Carapezza
(University of Palermo)

The undisputed dominance of the English language in the world leads us to take into consideration the role of English as a *lingua franca*, facilitating international relationships and allowing an academic life. In other words English is today what Latin represented yesterday. The Global English of the 21st century is characterized by the extraordinary fact that it is used by non-English speakers in non-anglophone countries, thus favouring the process of standardization, thanks to global communication.

According to research done by Crystal (1997) there are about 350 million speakers of ENL (English as a Native Language) in the world, while speakers of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) are approximately 100 millions. The main objective of EAP (English for Academic Purposes) is to offer all the learners linguistic competence covering all types of curricula in social sciences, in arts or in the sciences.

As Gotti, Hyland and Swales stated, there has been an increasing interest towards knowledge creation, thus favouring a link between teaching, learning, literacy and a more general comprehension of the disciplines. *Integration* as a pedagogic strategy on the one hand preserves the subject being taught and on the other hand highlights the role of language in the learning process itself. Students can learn any subject effectively through the medium of a language different from the usual language for subject instruction in their regular curricula. Pennycock (1996) has put into evidence the consequences deriving from the use of words in different cultures and languages.

So it is only through a perfect balance between the development of study skills to an appropriate level and language competence that students can get accustomed to academic conventions. New trends in methodology see the receptive skills strictly integrated with the productive ones.

The acronym TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test) refers to the assessment test that teachers can take in order to check their level of English knowledge. Teachers involved in school and university programmes following the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach have accepted the challenges faced by non native lecturers dealing with international programmes. The 'need' for specific/specialized training to teach in a foreign language is more and more required by academics, experts and school teachers and staff. Moreover the increase of internationalisation programmes in Europe has triggered and facilitated student mobility (Erasmus) and transnational cooperation in all fields of research choosing mainly English over national languages.

A comparative analysis of paper-based and computer-based summative English language exams at the Centro Linguistico di Ateneo of the University of Calabria
Sayuri Kusumoto, Elena Raso, Helen Marie Spina
(University of Calabria)

The aim of this presentation is to compare paper-based and computer based end-of-term English language exams. The latter have recently been implemented at the University of Calabria, for the degree course in *Scienze dell'Educazione*, after a piloting session was carried out. This was the first step towards the computerisation of the final English exams for the students whose English component is offered by the Centro Linguistico di Ateneo (CLA).

The English language summative exam consists of six B1 lower CEFR level activities: reading comprehension; skimming; language in context; matching; text completion; understanding a graph.

The presentation will begin with an overview of the paper-based exam, and the process it entails. We will then focus on the initial stages of the transition towards computer-based testing, and discuss the reasons which led to this choice. The transition towards computer-based testing is still ongoing, and involves various teams: the IT Team, the Test Development Team, the Piloting Group as well as the team involved in invigilating and correcting the final exams, which are all supervised by a group of coordinators. Different questionnaires were distributed to the parties involved in the project.

The core of the presentation is a comparative analysis of the two above-mentioned typologies of exams administered to the students, based on the feedback from both the questionnaires and the exam results. We will be looking at the positive features and drawbacks of the paper-based and computer-based exams, as well as the effectiveness and efficiency of the tests themselves.

We will then talk about future developments of the computer-based exams, in particular, looking at possible improvements of evaluation tools, which may render the process of evaluation more streamlined, sustainable and user-friendly.

Studio di fattibilita' per servizi aggiuntivi del Centro Linguistico di Ateneo dell'Università di Palermo
Jaana Helena Simpanen e Paolo Piacenti
(University of Palermo)

L'approvazione del nuovo regolamento nel 2011 ha messo il Centro Linguistico di Ateneo dell'Università di Palermo dinanzi a una prova chiave: aggiornare le proprie competenze e i saperi per rispondere alle nuove sfide in un periodo in cui la crisi influisce negativamente anche sulle risorse umane, logistiche e organizzative.

Questo contributo intende presentare una riflessione sulla fattibilità per una nuova gamma di servizi linguistici a pagamento da inserire nel portafoglio dell'offerta formativa del Centro dopo due anni di attività.

Il *paper*, finalizzato alle redazione di un piano strategico, è orientato in primo luogo all'identificazione e al reimpiego della capacità lavorativa non utilizzata e alla sua sostenibilità.. Esso mira a valutare sia la fattibilità che l'effettiva convenienza economico-finanziaria dell'inserimento di servizi linguistici a pagamento. La metodologia utilizzata a tal fine è strutturata in tre stadi:

1) L' identificazione e la catalogazione delle risorse di cui dispone il Centro Linguistico di

Ateneo;

2) Calcolo dell'impatto marginale di ogni servizio sulle risorse;

3) Studio di fattibilità vero e proprio: dimensionamento delle nuove attività, calcolo del costo differenziale, conto economico di previsione e degli effetti finanziari sul centro di responsabilità.

Lo spirito che anima la maggior parte delle scelte di questo lavoro è orientato alla minimizzazione degli sprechi. Nel caso in studio, questi sono principalmente causati dalla struttura a gradini dei costi associati alle principali risorse, i quali causano un non indifferente grado di improduttività.

L'idea dello studio di fattibilità per servizi linguistici aggiuntivi a pagamento nasce dalla personale esperienza da Coordinatore didattico presso il Centro Linguistico di Ateneo dell'Università di Palermo, dove l'offerta linguistica è costantemente chiamata ad ampliarsi nonostante la contrazione delle risorse, e dove lo staff docente, amministrativo e tecnico-linguistico in servizio è spesso numericamente insufficiente rispetto all'alto numero di utenti e alle professionalità richieste.