Abstracts

Problematising and Categorising Academic Literacy: Experiences in Academic Support on Masters-level Programmes at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, Aga Khan Centre, London

Roy Wilson (Institute of Ismaili Studies, Aga Khan Centre, London) & Robert Chang (St George's University of London)

Academic support units or teams at higher education institutions need to understand what academic literacy is and how it manifests itself in student issues in writing, reading and researching at university. This talk is an account of our experience of categorising academic literacy issues in support of two master’s programmes in London in humanities and pedagogy programmes within a community HE organisation (the Institute of Ismaili Studies), and a discussion around problematising categorisation. We also discuss uses of this categorisation and record-keeping of academic literacy issues in our institution and discuss the theoretical and practical usefulness of the data in our context.

Investigating aspects of students' source use in an integrated reading-into-writing test

Martine Holland (CRELLA / Cambridge Assessment English)

Integrated reading into writing is becoming more popular as a means of testing academic literacy skills for university admissions. This study explored a possible taxonomy for academic literacy, and then used this taxonomy to analyse an instance of a reading-into-writing test used for postgraduate university admissions (the prototype Cambridge Assessment English Academic Literacy Test). This test was analysed both quantitatively in terms of its concurrent validity (measured here as correlation between test mark and previous academic year university grade), and qualitatively through case studies to discover how well it elicits individual aspects of academic literacy. In this presentation I will focus on the case study findings relating to source use, in particular the difficulties of eliciting synthesis of sources, appropriate quotation and critical engagement. I will also suggest some ways that these subskills could be elicited in future reading-into-writing test development.
‘Some topics are just so English and middle-class!’: Topic-related issues in an international speaking test

*Nahal Khabbazbashi* (*CRELLA*)

In this talk I will be looking at the issue of *topics* in the IELTS speaking test drawing on two different studies. The first small-scale study (Khabbazbashi, 2017) focuses on the impact of topics and candidates’ background knowledge of topics on performance scores both at the test level and at task level. The second study (Inoue, Khabbazbashi, Lam, and Nakatsuhara, 2019) is a large-scale project with over 1200 IELTS speaking examiners exploring their views on different aspects of the test and I will be focusing on how they perceived the appropriateness of topics in terms of candidates’ cultural background, gender, age, and interests. Findings from the score data suggested that while topics and background knowledge of topics have a systematic effect on performance, these failed to translated into practical significance. Findings from the thematic analysis of examiner interviews, on the other hand, suggested a potentially negative impact of topic-related issues not only on candidates’ test experiences but also on their performance where ‘a portion of their interview [may be] less representative of their ability’. Common emerging themes from these two studies will be further discussed in order to shed light on some of the main challenges related to selecting topics in the context of an international standardised test and to suggest possible ways forward for the future of the test.

What B2-C2 level learners' speech production in dialogic tasks reveals about their pragmatic competence

*Edit Ficzere* (*CRELLA*)

[Forthcoming]

Reflections on standard setting

*Jane Lloyd* (*CRELLA / Cambridge Assessment English*)

This presentation outlines a current CEFR-alignment project at Cambridge Assessment. One aspect of this large scale project involves validating the alignment of a new national English curriculum in Malaysia to the CEFR. It looks at how methods and approaches to standard setting used in language testing can be adapted to align curricula, and what the issues are when implementing an assessment literacy approach in work with external stakeholders.
Developing an advanced, specialized English proficiency test for Beijing universities

*Liz Hamp-Lyons (CRELLA) & Wenxia Zhang (Tsinghua University)*

As the general level of English proficiency among university undergraduates in China rises, some institutions and academic departments want to increase their graduates’ marketability by offering students the opportunity to take a discipline-focussed English language test in their third year. This project, sponsored by the Beijing College English Research Association, is identifying the need for specifically discipline-focused English language courses and developing a template for the assessment of achievement in those courses. The need for assessments of academic writing and speaking, skills which are less often assessed in China and are increasingly seen to be as essential to success in intra-company as in international communication, has already been identified. Assessable task types which have already emerged include source-based writing, and interactive speaking.