

# **EALTA Special Interest Groups for the *Assessment of Writing and Assessment for Academic Purposes***

**Time:** Thursday, 29th May, 2014 (13.30-17.30)

**Location:** Ramphal 1.03, Ramphal Building, University of Warwick

## **PROGRAMME**

(Presentations 20 minutes, 10 minutes for questions)

**13.30-13.35 Claudia Harsch, Peter Holt - Welcome and Introduction**

### **Presentations**

**13.35 - 14.05**

**Atta Gebril, The American University, Cairo**

#### Scoring source-based writing tasks: Challenges and opportunities

There has been a growing interest in using source-based writing tasks in a wide range of instructional and assessment programs, particularly in academic settings. This interest is due to their authenticity since these tasks replicate academic settings where writers synthesize information from different sources while producing texts. In addition, source-based writing provide background knowledge in assessment contexts, which can mitigate topic effects typically reported in traditional writing tests. However, source-based writing is not without challenges and scoring is one of the most commonly cited problems. The current paper investigates the challenges raters encounter when scoring source-based writing tasks. Examples of challenges discussed in this presentation include the ineffectiveness of current scoring rubrics in accurately capturing the target construct, the inadequacy of rater training, and the common disagreement over what constitutes appropriate textual borrowing practices. The presenter will also offer a critical analysis of the current source-based writing scoring rubrics used in a number of writing programs. Data-driven evidence supporting the need for a paradigm shift in scoring source-based tasks will be suggested. The presenter will argue for developing scoring rubrics that pay more attention to discourse synthesis and citation mechanics. These two features are envisioned to be adequately represented at different levels of scoring rubrics along with traditional language and content issues. Based on this discussion, the presenter will propose a research agenda that addresses related challenges and opportunities. Finally, guidelines will be shared with professionals interested in using source-based writing tasks in academic writing classes.

**Atta Gebril** is an assistant professor in the Department of Applied Linguistics at the American University in Cairo, Egypt. He teaches courses in language assessment and research methods in applied linguistics. His research interests include writing assessment, reading-writing connections, and test validation. He serves on the editorial board of *Journal of Language Testing and Language Assessment Quarterly*. His work has appeared in a number of international journals including, *Language Testing*, *Language Assessment Quarterly*, *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *Assessing Writing*, and *Assessment in Education*. He has taught in the USA, United Arab Emirates, and Egypt. He has also worked on a number of test development projects in different parts of the world.

#### 14.05 - 14.35

**Mehdi Riazi and Jill Murray, Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University, Sydney**

##### Linguistic features of the texts produced by high- vs. low-performers in TOEFL-iBT writing tasks

This study, which is part of a larger scale research project funded by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), reports on the linguistic features of the texts produced by postgraduate students for the two TOEFL-iBT writing tasks. Data were collected from 30 postgraduate students studying at 4 major universities in New South Wales, Australia in 2011 and 2012. Participants completed the TOEFL-iBT writing test module, which consists of two writing tasks, one integrated and one independent. The test tasks were scored by ETS experienced raters, and based on the scores of each task, test takers were divided into high- vs. low-performers using the median score for each task. Both Task 1 and Task 2 texts of the high and low-performers were then analysed using the Coh-matrix text analysis program and six indices related to syntactic complexity, word knowledge (lexical diversity and word frequency) and cohesion (index of all connectives and co-referentiality) were computed for the texts. Results of the text analysis for the two groups across the two writing tasks will be presented and discussed. Moreover, implications of the findings for the reliability of the scores and the scalability of the writing tasks in terms of the linguistic features of the texts will be discussed.

Mehdi Riazi is associate professor of applied linguistics in the department of linguistics, Macquarie University, Australia. He convenes two postgraduate units of Research Methods and Language Testing and Evaluation and supervises doctoral and masters theses. His areas of interest include academic writing and assessment of L2 writing, test validation and research methodology. He has been the chief investigator of three research projects on test validation funded by IELTS, Pearson, and Educational Testing Service (ETS), TOEFL-iBT section.

#### 14.35 - 15.05

**Amanda Smith, INTO, Manchester**

##### EAP reading-to-write test design considerations

For some time colleagues and I have felt that the discursive essay which forms part of the summative assessment on our Graduate Diploma programme is creating negative washback, while the coursework (including a literature review) serves our students' long-term needs more effectively. As part of my MA TESOL at Sheffield Hallam University, I investigated students' perceptions of and performance on the existing exam format and an alternative exam: a reading-to-write exam. 31 international pre-postgraduates in Manchester were set a reading-to-write exam as well as the usual discursive essay a part of their first term's exams. Students' scores on the two essay types were compared and quantitative data on their perceptions of the two essay types was gathered from the whole sample. Qualitative data was collected via two focus groups totalling 6 participants and a teacher interview. The reading-to-write essay was rated more favourably than the discursive essay on five criteria: ease of exam, ease of preparation, interest of preparation, suitability as a post-graduate selection tool and

usefulness; in most cases, students' performance was judged to be the same or better on this task type. Despite these positive results, there remain many unresolved issues relating to task design of reading-to-write exams and marking criteria, and these will be a focus of my presentation.

Amanda Smith has been teaching and living in Manchester for 14 years. She has taught EAP at the same institution, INTO Manchester, for 13 years, the last four of which have been spent on the Graduate Diploma programme, teaching EAP to international pre-post-graduate students. Before that, she taught general EFL to children and adults for 6 years in Spain and London.

**15-05-15.30 Coffee Break**

**15.30 - 16.00**

**John Read, University of Auckland**

Post-entry Language Assessment in English Medium Universities

English-medium universities face significant challenges arising from the linguistic diversity of their students. It is a well-established practice that international students need to achieve a minimum score in a major proficiency test as one of the requirements for admission. Numerous institutions also use their own placement tests to put these students into required ESL or writing courses as necessary after they arrive on campus. However, there is increasing recognition that domestic students often have significant language and literacy needs as well. This has led to a new approach, which has come to be known in Australia as post-entry language assessment (PELA). It is intended to identify students who at risk of failing or underachieving in their academic studies and to guide or direct them to appropriate forms of academic language support and enhancement that are available on campus. The most comprehensive programme of this kind is the Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment (DELNA), which was introduced at the University of Auckland in New Zealand in 2002. After a brief introduction to the rationale for PELA, this presentation will outline how DELNA operates as a two-stage process of Screening and Diagnosis, which involves all first-year students entering the university, regardless of their language background. It will consider the nature of the constructs underlying this form of assessment, contrasting DELNA with another programme at the University of Sydney, based on the construct of academic literacies. There will also be some discussion of the extent to which DELNA can be regarded as 'diagnostic' in nature.

John Read is Associate Professor in Applied Language Studies and Linguistics at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. He has taught applied linguistics, TESOL and English for academic purposes at tertiary institutions in New Zealand, Singapore and the United States. His primary research interests are in second language vocabulary assessment and the testing of English for academic and professional purposes. John is the author of *Assessing Vocabulary* (Cambridge, 2000) and is currently completing a book on post-entry language assessment in universities for Palgrave Macmillan. He was President of the International Language Testing Association in 2011 and 2012.

**16.00 - 16.30**

**Linda Nepivodova, Masaryk University, Brno**

A tale of two paradigms: a comparison of test mode delivery on either side of the Atlantic

This study was originally designed to explore students' attitudes to computer-based language testing at tertiary level. Students studying at two universities, one domestic and one American, have taken part in this research and have been asked to express their opinions, thoughts and feelings concerning the different modes of language test delivery they have experienced. A survey has been administered to more than 200 students so far and their responses will be further supported and elaborated on by semi-

structured interviews of a number of both Czech and American students. The mixed method approach combining quantitative and qualitative research will be used in order to gain more profound data. During the study focused on the mode of test administration, the researcher came across the different ways EAP testing is carried out at the two institutions, for example, one is linked directly to CEFR, while the other is not. The researcher thus decided to look into the differences, especially as far as level specifications, test content, its focus, and scoring are concerned. Both US and Czech approaches are described in detail, contrasted and their possible advantages and disadvantages are outlined. The students' attitudes to computer-based tests are also presented and discussed. The results bring about some interesting comparisons and surprising outcomes.

Linda Nepivodová has been involved in English language teaching since 2000. She holds an M.A. in English Language and Literature, is CELTA and DELTA qualified, and is currently working as a teacher trainer at the English Department at Masaryk University in Brno. Her research interests include testing and assessment, error correction and SLA.

## **16.30 - 17.00**

**Daniela Dvorakova, Masaryk University, Brno**

### Computer-Based Testing in a Course of English for Specific Purposes

This paper deals with the implications of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) for developing computer-based tests at B2 level designed for the course of English for specific purposes. The tests will contribute to the effort to standardize assessment of language competencies in specialised areas of a foreign language. The difference between knowledge and competence and the characteristics of English for specific purposes are highlighted in the introduction. The first part of the paper is aimed at the stages of test construction and the ways of selecting appropriate topics, contents and levels of difficulty, as well as task types and items. The second part presents an analysis of the test results. Questionnaires specifically designed for and completed by the students who took the tests are also included in this part. The analysis of the test results and questionnaires provides valuable information on the quality of the test items. In the last part of the paper the author considers the benefits and possible challenges of computer-based tests together with the lessons learned in the process of developing them.

Daniela Dvořáková graduated from Palacký University in Olomouc with a M.A. (1998) in Spanish and English Philology. She also studied Spanish at the Universities of Granada and Oviedo in Spain and English at the Defence Language Institute in Lackland, Texas, USA. She was a lecturer at the Military Medical Academy of J. E. Purkyně in Hradec Králové. Since 2007 she has held a position of a lecturer of English at the Masaryk University Language Centre in Brno. She is involved in developing materials for the courses in the M.A. programmes. She is also interested in the assessment of students' performance and testing.

## **17.00 - 17.30 Discussion Box**

The final part of the meeting will be a discussion based on questions you may have, or issues you wish to raise, related to the assessment of writing or assessment for academic purposes, stimulated either by the presentations or by your own context. Questions will be collected during the meeting and then randomly drawn from the box to be discussed by the audience.