

*Abstracts*

Framing academic literacy: considerations and implications for language assessment

*Professor Lynda Taylor (Visiting Professor CRELLA)*

English language tests have been used for over half a century to evaluate students' academic literacy skills for English medium instruction (EMI) higher education contexts. The use of large-scale tests has grown considerably over that period in response to the internationalisation of higher education and the expansion of overseas study opportunities for both undergraduates and postgraduates. While the nature of 'academic literacy' (AL) was not originally well defined in the 1960s, recent decades have seen the emergence of different paradigms reflecting differing understandings and priorities. These have clear implications for how language tests can be designed and utilised to determine the skill levels that international students will need to undertake their studies.

This presentation will briefly comment on different approaches to defining academic literacy skills and the challenges of sampling these through language assessment tools. It will consider how some of the most well-known English tests currently choose to operationalise the AL construct, e.g. IELTS, TOEFL-IBT, and will review some of the research that provides validation evidence for their 'fitness for purpose'. Finally, it will explore how recent developments in pedagogy and advances in technology could reframe notions of academic literacy and frame how it is assessed in the future.

This presentation will draw upon the lifetime work of Professor Cyril Weir in the field of assessing academic literacy, particularly as it concerns IELTS, (Weir and Chan, forthcoming).

Developing an academic literacy test for university students

*Nicola Latimer (CRELLA)*

In recent decades UK universities have attracted an increasingly diverse range of students, both domestic and international. The widening participation agenda has increased the number of domestic students from sectors of society that have traditionally been underrepresented and, in tough economic times, increasing numbers of international students have provided



As such, this research contributes to the provision of meaningful feedback to learners on IC, which is an essential component of communicative language and yet cannot be effectively addressed via digital technologies and therefore needs substantial teacher involvement. This study, in line with Cambridge English Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA) approach (e.g. Hamp-Lyons & Green 2014, Jones & Saville 2016), took the first step to offering teachers practical tools for feedback on learners' interactional skills.

## An overview of current assessment practices in universities in Ukraine

*Olga Kvasova (Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine)*

In my talk I will report on the gained hands-on experience from multiple perspectives: as a university teacher engaged in classroom assessment, a teacher trainer in LTA and a researcher of LTA practices both in my workplace and across the country.

Ukrainian FL education boasts a long-established tradition of implementing formative assessment in a variety of formats: regular check of home assignments, short quizzes, answering teacher's questions, pre-prepared and spontaneous speaking performance, etc. The formative grades are documented by teachers, which allows them to arrive at a cumulative score before administering end-of-term tests; the scores attained during the term are further

## Authenticity: the elephant in the language tester's room

*John Field (CRELLA)*

A fundamental consideration in evaluating any second language test is the extent to which the language that the test taker is asked to produce or comprehend can be said to resemble that of the real-world context in which he/she will operate. This is particularly an issue in tests of listening – and even more so when the listening in question reflects the demands of a specific (e.g. academic or professional) domain.

For various reasons, high-stakes international test providers find it challenging to obtain authentic recordings for their listening exams. They may well pay lip service to authenticity by maintaining that their material is derived from 'authentic sources'; but, in practice, they tend to rely heavily upon scripted material and to a lesser extent upon semi-scripted. The perceived advantages of the latter type are that, while the scripts have their roots in actual speech events, they can be reshaped to meet the demands of the test and recorded under studio conditions.

Producing such material demands a great deal of the item writer – considerably more than is generally recognised. This talk first notes the ways in which conventional test methods may come to warp the structure of natural discourse. It then goes on to use evidence from recent tests in order to demonstrate a large gap between authentic natural speech and the type of language that typically features in a listening task. In academic contexts in particular, the outcome can be seen in scripts which diverge markedly from the reality of the lecture or seminar. In many cases, the difference between script and natural speech reflects assumptions that are far too closely shaped by written sources and by the experience of reading. In others, the problem seems to arise from the fact that L1 listeners are well practised in editing out redundant features in the speech of others.

The conclusion must be that, if tests of listening are to achieve construct validity, item writer training has to sensitise professionals much more systematically to the true nature of connected speech, whether in interactional or in presentational contexts. Much greater reference should be made to authentic corpora, so as to raise awareness of the major characteristics of natural speech in relation to discourse, phraseology, vocabulary and speaker delivery. We need to radically reshape the preconceptions of both those who commission items and those who produce them.