

Constructing Language and Literacy Practices– Implications for Assessment

ABSTRACT

The construct of language proficiency in our time has been largely understood in terms of lexicogrammatical knowledge and the ability of an individual to make use of it in communication. At the same time, communication, or more precisely communicative acts such as discussion in a meeting, has been seen as comprising a set of typical characteristics that is routinely enacted, irrespective of context and participant volition. While this approach has been very helpful in bringing together structural and socio-pragmatic aspects of language use, there is growing recognition that these typifications can only provide a partial account of the dynamic and contingent nature of language use in communication. *In extremis*, this approach can reify language proficiency as a set of generalizable scripted productions. In this talk I will exemplify this by looking at relevant research in academic language and literacy in higher education.

Recent research in Academic Literacy/ies has consistently shown that there is considerable diversity in language and literacy practices across different disciplines. Empirical accounts of the lack of correspondence between the tasks in some academic language tests and the actual in-course language use point to the problems of over-relying on generalized *pre*-scripted (e.g. Elder, 2007; Paul, 2007). In the first part of my talk I will examine the construct of academic language and literacy as it has been represented in large-scale assessment frameworks (e.g. CEFR) against the backdrop of some of the empirical findings from the field of Academic Literacy/ies with particular reference to higher education (e.g. Lea and Street, 1998, 2006; Tribble and Wingate, 2013; Wingate, 2015). I will then argue for the need to recognise multiple constructs of academic language and literacy and to take account of the diverse processes of *doing* academic literacy. In the last part of the talk I will discuss the implications of a situated, practice- and process-informed view of construct for the assessment of academic language and literacy.

Biodata



I have been teaching and researching additional/second language education issues for many years. I was a school teacher before taking up a position in higher education. My academic and research interests include academic literacies, content and language-integrated curriculum development, educational provision for linguistic minority students, language assessment, and language policy. I am a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences (UK).

Research

My recent research projects include:

- ESRC-funded 'Modelling for Diversity: Academic Language and Literacies in School and University' (RES-062-23-1666), with Professor Brian Street.
- Comenius-funded 'European Teacher Education – Second Language Core Curriculum' (141836-2008-LLP-DE-COMENIUS-CMP) – a multilateral project involving researchers from nine European Union member states.

I am currently co-ordinating a Bell Foundation-funded research project developing an English as an Additional Language (EAL) assessment framework for primary and secondary schools (with particular reference to the UK schooling frameworks).

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/education/people/academic/leungc.aspx>

Fluency and Interactivity

ABSTRACT

Fluency, and the variables associated with its representation, are of interest to a wide variety of researchers for at least two reasons: (1) the association of fluency with general language proficiency and (2) the relative ease with which temporal measures of fluency can be captured. Temporal measures of oral fluency (speech rate, mean length of run, number and duration of pauses, pause placement) have served as useful proxies for human raters' evaluations of spoken speech, and length variables (number of words, phrases, clauses) also serve as useful proxies for human raters' evaluations of writing. Reading rate variables (number of words/minute or syllables/second) also serve well as proxies for general reading proficiency. However, temporal measures of fluency are viewed as indirect and narrow – poor proxies of the richer representations of language proficiency that we value more highly. In this presentation, I will discuss the relationship between fluency and interactivity and will explore the ways in which the development of second language fluency is foundational to broader notions of communicative competence

Biodata



English as a Second Language, Language testing and measurement

April Ginther is an Associate Professor of Second Language Studies and Linguistics at Purdue University where she teaches courses in language testing, classroom assessment, and quantitative research. She is the Director of the Oral English Proficiency Program (OEPP), Purdue University's language support program for international teaching assistants.

Additionally, she is currently directing the development of an associated language support program, the Purdue Language and Cultural Exchange (PLaCE), for Purdue's international undergraduate students. The international student population at Purdue (10,000) consistently ranks among the top five for public institutions in the United States, and both of the programs she directs include English language proficiency testing for as many as 1,000 international students annually. Before coming to Purdue, she was a bilingual elementary school teacher in the Dallas Independent School District where she taught bilingual/ESL third-grade classes, and after receiving her Ph.D. from the University of New Mexico in 1994, she spent three years as a research scientist at the Educational Testing Service (ETS). Her research interests include the development and use of English language proficiency tests, the integration of testing and instruction, and the measurement of the development of language proficiency over time. She is currently the co-editor of the journal *Language Testing*.

https://www.cla.purdue.edu/ENGLISH/directory/index.aspx?p=April_Ginther