

## 7th CBLA SIG

Thursday 5th May 2016 - 13.30-17.10

(4P Language Centre Building)

13<sup>th</sup> EALTA Conference, Universitat Politècnica de Valencia, Valencia, Spain

### 13.25-13.30 Welcome

*(15 min. presentations followed by 5 min. discussion)*

13.30-13.50 **Claudia Mewald & Sabine Wallner** 'Assessing young learners' foreign language in the classroom'

13.50-14.15 **Atta Gebril** 'Language Teachers' Assessment Beliefs: Voices From The Field'

14.15-14.40 **Saeedeh Haghi** 'Using Classroom Formative Assessment to Monitor Students' Progress in Writing and Reading Skills for Academic Purposes'

14.40-15.00 **Hossein Farhady & Merve Selçuk** 'Classroom-based Diagnostic Assessment Practices of EFL Instructors'

### 15.00-15.15 Coffee Break

15.15-15.40 **Sabrina Machetti & Paola Masillo** 'A survey on the Italian language development in foreign young learners'

15.40-16.00 **Carolyn Westbrook** 'Bridging the gap between classroom-based language assessment and the Russian National State Exam'

16.00-16.20 **Judith Sebastiani** 'Diagnostic competence and teacher attitudes towards external assessment'

16.20-16.45 **Doris Froetscher** 'A national exam's washback on classroom testing: teachers' voices'

16.45-17.05 **Trisevgeni Lontou** 'The Impact of Self-Assessment Techniques on Young EFL learners' Writing Competence: An Experimental Approach'

### 17.05-17.10 Closing remarks and planning of future SIG activities

## Assessing young learners' foreign language in the classroom

Claudia Mewald & Sabine Wallner

University College of Teacher Education in Lower Austria, Baden

This paper deals with the development and the validation of a construct for a series of short formative tests which aim at assessing the foreign language ability of young learners at the transition from kindergarten to primary school and throughout their first two years of formal instruction. In construct development, theories of second and third language learning and acquisition were taken into consideration. Moreover, curricular goals and performance descriptors which are used to provide orientation for the primary school educators in foreign language instruction were included. The formative tests intend to facilitate instruction and inform remediation (Green, 2014) in that they provide feedback on the learners' progress based on their performance in periodic assessments scaffolded by mediation through the test person, i.e. the learners' class teacher or another person they are familiar with. Feedback about learner attainment is expected to lead the teachers towards focussed planning and adjustment of input in terms of content and method and of expected output in terms of target group fit and appropriacy. Thus, the construct becomes a valuable tool in guiding backward learning design in addition to curricular goals. Its role in demonstrating the appropriateness of the content and the task types used in teaching as well as in formative testing is fleshed out. Moreover, it is argued that the construct for formative testing can support the teachers' understanding of conclusions drawn on the basis of performances from a Vygotskian perspective (Poehner, 2008).

Green, A. (2014). *Exploring Language Assessment and Testing*. Language in Action. New York: Routledge.

Poehner, M. E. (2008). *Dynamic Assessment. A Vygotskian Approach to Understanding and Promoting L2 Development*. Heidelberg: Springer.

**Mewald, Claudia** is Professor at the University College of Teacher Education in Lower Austria, Baden, where she leads the English language programme and teaches several courses in the area of methodology, applied linguistics, and testing and assessment. She has researched and published in the field of second language teaching, content and language integrated learning, and the washback of testing and assessment on learning. Her current research focuses on language acquisition in plurilingual contexts.

**Wallner, Sabine** worked as an English and CLIL teacher for learners from the age of three to seventy for 25 years before she started to teach at the University Colleges of Teacher Education in Lower Austria, Baden and Burgenland, Eisenstadt. The courses she teaches are literature, applied linguistics, methodology and media didactics. She has researched and published in the fields of second language teaching.

## Language Teachers' Assessment Beliefs: Voices From The Field

Atta Gebril

Department of Applied Linguistics, the American University in Cairo.

Research has shown that teachers' conceptions and beliefs of how content is assessed affect the way they teach and what students learn. However, many of the assessment literacy programs in schools do not target how teachers conceive assessment but rather focus mainly on providing relevant knowledge and skills. A necessary step for addressing this problem is to have basic understanding of the types of conceptions teachers hold about assessment. For this purpose, the current study investigates the assessment conceptions among pre-service and in-service English teachers in Egypt. To address these issues, a questionnaire measuring conceptions of assessment was designed based on previous research in this area. The questionnaire was administered with 170 pre-service and in-service English teachers representing. Then, data were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Quantitative analysis, specifically descriptive statistics and analysis of variance, was used to compare the performance of both pre-service and in-service teachers on the close-ended questionnaire questions. For the open-ended questions, thematic analysis was employed to identify the different patterns emerging from the data. The results of the study showed in-service teachers preferring a combination of formative and summative assessment practices while pre-service teachers favored a relatively summative paradigm. With regard to functions of assessment, in-service teachers endorsed the improvement function of assessment more than the pre-service group. Both groups had negative perceptions about the effectiveness of teacher training programs. The study provides a number of implications for teacher education programs, teacher trainers, and policy makers. Teacher educators should focus on understanding and also changing the attitudes towards assessment in pre-service teacher training to insure better assessment practices in our schools.

**Atta Gebril** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Applied Linguistics and chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the American University in Cairo. He teaches courses in second language assessment and research methods in applied linguistics. He also serves on the editorial board of *Journal of Language Testing and Language Assessment Quarterly*. His work has appeared in a number of journals including, *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *Language Testing*, *Language Assessment Quarterly*, *Assessing Writing*, *Teacher Development*, and *Assessment in Education*. His book entitled *Assessment myths*, coauthored with Lia Plakans, was published by the University of Michigan Press in 2015.

## Using Classroom Formative Assessment to Monitor Students' Progress in Writing and Reading Skills for Academic Purposes

**Saeedeh Haghi**

**Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick**

In recent years, studies of assessment have witnessed a burgeoning interest in the interactions between assessment and learning and teaching practices. The use of assessment is no longer confined to measuring learners' achievement: it is also used as a means of providing information that can facilitate learning and instructional practices. Formative Assessment (William and Black, 1998) which serves such a function is regarded as a powerful means of enhancing student achievement (Irons, 2008). Considering this method of assessment and its efficacy in improving student performance, a case study project including the design, development and use of a series of formative assessment tasks for evaluating reading and writing skills for academic purposes, was conducted for a pre-session course in the UK. This project investigated the practicality of designing formative tasks from EAP textbooks and the effectiveness of using these tasks in relation to students' learning gains. To this end a series of narrative inquiries, including pre-session tutors' reflective pedagogy and students' voices in the effectiveness of using FA tasks were collected. The findings of this research project will provide insights for both EAP tutors and learners including the feasibility of designing FA tasks by adapting teaching activities in EAP text books, the realistic link between the theory and practice of FA, and the effectiveness of these tasks in finding the learning gap, monitoring learning progress, and setting and achieving learning goals.

**Saeedeh Haghi** has been working and researching in ELT for the last 11 years, during which times she has been involved in teaching and teacher training in English for general, specific and academic purposes. She gained an MA in language assessment and testing, and is currently pursuing a PhD and is an EAP tutor at the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom. She is also a British Council APTIS test examiner. Her research interests involve language tests for academic purposes, post enrolment language needs assessment, formative assessment and rater bias.

## Classroom-based Diagnostic Assessment Practices of EFL Instructors

Hossein Farhady & Merve Selçuk

Yeditepe University, Istanbul, Turkey

Diagnostic assessment (DA) in language classrooms is reported to have a substantial role in providing immediate and quality feedback for remedial work that would remove learning deficiencies. However, applying DA in class remains a challenge for many practitioners for at least two reasons: First, there is no clear conceptualization for DA in the field, and second, despite advancements in university teacher education (TE) programs, they provide limited courses to equip teacher candidates with necessary classroom assessment knowledge. To address the issue, this study is designed to explore DA practices and processes of experienced university EFL instructors with the hope of developing a sound and empirically supported framework for classroom-based DA in EFL context. The data will be collected from 5 instructors with an MA in TEFL and related fields with at least 5 years of teaching experience. They will be provided with scenarios presenting certain problems, asked to explain what procedures and processes they employ to diagnose the problem and what they do as remedial instruction. Based on the findings, a framework will be proposed for classroom-based DA. The paper will also include discussion of the need to incorporate theoretical practical dimensions of DA in pre-service and in-service TE programs.

**Dr. Hossein Farhady** is currently an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at Yeditepe University, Istanbul, Turkey. His major interest is research on various aspects of language assessment. He has taught courses on language testing, research methods, and ESP at the MA and PhD levels for the last four decades in Iran, Canada, Armenia, and USA. He has also presented papers in national and international conferences and has widely published on the issues related to language testing. He has published more than 30 books and 50 articles on various topics in applied linguistics in general and in language assessment, in particular. His latest publications are “Assessing Farsi” in the Companion to Language Assessment (2013), “Quantitative research methods” in the Encyclopedia of applied linguistics (2012), and “Language assessment policy in Iran” (2009) in Annual Review of Applied Linguistics. He has directed several MA programs in TEFL and supervised over 50 MA theses and a few PhD dissertations. He has conducted two nationwide research projects on evaluating EFL learning in Iran and directed several test development and test validation projects in Iran and abroad.

**Merve Selçuk** is currently employed as the advisor to the rector of Kemerburgaz University and works as responsible for all language programs. She is pursuing her Ph.D in the field of Language Assessment under the supervision of Dr. Hossein Farhady at Yeditepe University. Her research interests are Language Assessment, Teacher Education and Training.

## ***A survey on the Italian language development in foreign young learners***

**Sabrina Machetti & Paola Masillo**  
**University for Foreigners of Siena, Italy**

In the last decades the presence of foreign children in the Italian educational system has caused an emergency training in which the basic needs are represented by learning Italian and producing suitable materials for the teaching and assessment of communicative language competence in Italian (ISTAT, 2014).

This paper discusses the improvement of assessment tools in Italy for foreign children and focuses on their impact on the language development and the educational processes (Saville, 2000).

It was developed a detailed information questionnaire for students involved in the survey. It includes traits focusing on standard demographic data and linguistic background. Then, two examination booklets were administered, respectively of CEFR levels A1 and A2, to a sample of young learners of Italian as a second language (ISL) attending the Italian primary school.

This impact research aims to investigate the effect of the multilingual competencies and the maintenance of L1 of young learners of ISL in their performances (Shohamy, 2011; Saville, 2012).

**Sabrina Machetti** is Professor in Educational Linguistics at the University for Foreigners of Siena (Italy). Currently, her scientific activity is focusing on the language sciences, specifically on the educational linguistics and semiotics. Currently she is directing the CILS Centre of the University for Foreigners in Siena, one of official certificate organisations of Italian as Foreign Language.

**Paola Masillo** has a PhD in Linguistics and Didactics of Italian as a foreign language. Her PhD project focused on validation analyses on language tests for migrants. Her main research focuses on language policies in education and migration contexts, educational linguistics, language testing and assessment. Currently, she is a research fellow at the University for Foreigners of Siena.

## **Bridging the gap between classroom-based language assessment and the Russian National State Exam**

**Carolyn Westbrook**

**Southampton Solent University, UK**

This presentation will report on a workshop funded by EALTA (to be) delivered in Surgut, Russia, in March 2016. Classroom teachers are often required to prepare their students for national and international examinations but for many, this is a challenge due to a lack of assessment literacy. Furthermore, the gap between the assessment *of* learning in standardised exams and assessment *for / as* learning can be difficult to bridge without an understanding of testing. As Learning-Oriented Assessment gains importance in classroom-based language assessment, it is imperative that teachers understand the basics of the different types of assessment and how they can construct tasks for learners which help to guide students towards success in national and international tests. The goals of the workshop are to develop Russian high school teachers' language assessment literacy and provide participants with an insight into Assessment *of* Learning, Assessment *for* Learning and Assessment *as* Learning as well as to enable them to construct Assessment *for / as* Learning tasks together which they can use in the classroom. This presentation will report on the workshop and participants' feedback on the workshop, highlighting lessons learned for future workshops on this topic in the Russian context.

**Carolyn Westbrook** is a Senior Lecturer in English as a Foreign Language at Southampton Solent University. She has over 20 years' experience of teaching and assessing General, Business and Academic English and is a teacher trainer who gives teacher development seminars both in the UK and abroad. She has recently been involved in an EU TEMPUS project (ProSET) aimed at developing assessment literacy among university lecturers and school teachers in Russia and has delivered numerous teacher training seminars and conference presentations in the Russian Federation. She has authored one of the books in the *Unlock* series from CUP and has also written materials for Cambridge English Teacher. She has an MA in Applied Linguistics for Language Teaching and is CELTA and DELTA qualified. Her main research interests are in the areas of teaching and assessing Academic Writing.

## Diagnostic competence and teacher attitudes towards external assessment

Judith Sebastiani

University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany

About ten years ago, *VERA8*, a compulsory low-stakes assessment for the subject of English, has been introduced to the German school system. The test focuses on listening and reading comprehension and is intended to support teachers in the diagnostic process, to provide hints for adaptive teaching and to set off discussions about innovations. It has been suggested that *VERA8* can provide insight into professional testing and lead to reflection upon classroom assessment (Bakker, 2014; Helmke et al., 2004). However, evaluation studies suggest that teachers rarely use *VERA8* to inform teaching and do not consider it as relevant for the improvement of teaching quality (Hellrung & Hartig, 2013; Skejic et al., 2015).

Since assessment literacy of foreign language teachers in Germany is rather underdeveloped (Vogt & Tsagari, 2014), we suggest that subject-specific diagnostic competence, a subcomponent of assessment literacy, should be fostered. In a training for in-service teachers, we would like to discuss different types and functions of assessment and analyze features of *VERA8*. Finally, we would like to explore whether our training has an impact on teacher attitudes towards *VERA8* and assessment in general.

**Judith Sebastiani** has earned her degree in English and French studies at Trier University. She has completed two years of teacher training and worked as a foreign language teacher at several German grammar schools. Since August 2015, she is a PhD student at the Graduate School “Teaching and Learning Processes (UpGrade)”, University of Koblenz-Landau (Germany).

## **A national exam's washback on classroom testing: teachers' voices**

**Doris Froetscher**

**Lancaster University, UK**

Despite several scholars' call for research (Wall & Alderson, 1993; Watanabe, 2000; Wall & Horak, 2006), little is yet known about the influence standardized tests exert on classroom-based language assessment.

The present study addresses this research gap by investigating washback in the context of a reformed high-stakes secondary school-leaving exam - the previously teacher-developed exam was replaced by a standardized national exam developed professionally according to good practice (EALTA, 2006; ILTA, 2007). The paper reports on research into the changes in classroom testing for reading. Data was collected in semi-structured interviews with 9 teachers, and coded and analysed thematically using MaxQDA.

Results indicate washback of the reformed national exam both on how teachers go about classroom tests, and what characteristics they consider important. Teachers clearly make the reformed exam accountable for a large part of their class testing choices. Furthermore, teachers' assessment literacy and attitude towards the new exam emerge as mediating factors, confirming Tierney (2006), and the complexity of washback in general (Tzagari, 2009). The findings of this study illustrate the washback of standardized exams on classroom tests, and thus highlight the necessity of washback considerations in any exam reform.

**Doris Froetscher** has a teaching qualification (MA) from Innsbruck University (Austria). She has been involved in the Austrian exam reform project from its beginnings at the University of Innsbruck. Doris is currently working as language assessment coordinator at BIFIE (federal institute for research, innovation and development), the institution responsible for the development and implementation of the national Austrian school-leaving exam. Doris is also enrolled in a PhD degree at Lancaster University, focusing on exam washback.

## **The Impact of Self-Assessment Techniques on Young EFL learners'**

### **Writing Competence: An Experimental Approach**

**Dr. Trisevgeni Liantou**

**Greek Ministry of Education**

Interest in alternative assessment has grown rapidly over the last few years since it can help teachers monitor and modify their instruction throughout the school year (Tsgari, 2004). One method of alternative assessment that can help students identify their own strengths and weaknesses and assess their own learning progress is self-assessment (McMillan, 2008). Motivated by the above literature, this presentation reports on a one-year longitudinal study that aimed at investigating the impact of self-assessment checklists on young EFL learners' development of writing competence. Following an experimental approach, a total of 50 EFL students aged 12 years old took part in the study from whom 500 written essays were collected, half of which belonged to the experimental group (revision of essays using self-assessment checklists to promote self-reflection).

The purpose of the study was to examine, using a range of advanced Computational Linguistics and Automated Machine Learning systems, whether the essays produced by the experimental group were of increased complexity when compared to the ones produced by the control group. The results showed statistically significant differences between the two groups regarding a range of linguistic features (propositional density, lexical sophistication, syntactic complexity and cohesion). These findings seem to support the notion that self-assessment checklists might help students improve their language competence while fostering intrinsic learning motivation.

The findings of the study provide practical guidance to EFL teachers and curriculum designers as to the kind of self-assessment techniques young learners should be exposed to in the EFL classroom.

**Trisevgeni Liantou** is an EFL teacher, researcher and test-designer for the Greek Ministry of Education. She holds a Ph.D. in English Linguistics with specialization in Language Testing from the Faculty of English Studies, National & Kapodistrian University of Athens. She has worked as a research assistant at the Research Centre for Language Teaching, Testing and Assessment (RCeL) and as an expert item consultant, freelance item writer, oral examiner and script rater for various international examination boards. She has made presentations in national and international conferences and has published papers in the aforementioned fields. Her current research interests include theoretical and practical issues of EFL reading comprehension, corpus linguistics and classroom-based language assessment.