

# Local institution, global examination

Tensions and synergies in a process of co-certification

# Tension

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1 The act of stretching; not laxation



2 The act of being stretched; not laxity

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# Tensions in testing

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- Reliability vs Validity
- Objective vs Subjective
- Underlying competence vs Measurable performance
- Real life language use vs Test taking context
- Intended purpose of test vs Use made of test results
- Test results vs Interpretation of test results
- Preparing for test vs Demands made by syllabus

etc etc etc..

- Global exam vs Local educational reality
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# Who do global exam boards listen to?

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**Testing research**

**Technological innovation**



**Developments in ELT**

**Marketing strategies**

***... and local feedback?***

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# The view from Venice

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## University of Venice 'Ca' Foscari'



One of the oldest faculties of modern languages in Italy  
Currently the largest, and with most languages taught

# Looking towards Europe

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- ▶ 1999: the Bologna agreement
- ▶ Turn of the millenium: introduction of CEFR and reform of the university system in Italy
- ▶ Protocols with ministry of education and international examining boards made certification possible in schools and universities
- ▶ Non-language faculties keen to take advantage
- ▶ Language faculties more reticent
- ▶ Venice University looks at possibility of adapting an existing 'global' exam to give it more 'local' relevance
- ▶ In 2004 begins partnership with Trinity college London to develop a 'co-certification'



# Co-certification

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- ▶ CO certification:



Co-certification: in accountancy, landscape gardening, weapons

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- ▶ *why not language proficiency?*

# Trinity-Ca' Foscari co-certification

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Università  
Ca'Foscari  
Venezia

- An agreement to adapt an existing general test of English (Trinity Integrated Skills in English) to make it more suitable for university students in Italy.
- Project began in 2005 at C1 level, extended in 2007 to B2 level



## adapting the Trinity ISE suite

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The ISE suite is **calibrated to the CEFR** and comprises

- ▶ a ***portfolio*** of three short written texts
- ▶ a ***controlled written exam***
- ▶ an ***oral exam***

In the Ca' Foscari version

- ▶ in the *portfolio* 'creative writing' is replaced by 'critical writing'
- ▶ in the *controlled written exam* one of the tasks is 'critical writing'
- ▶ in the *oral exam*, the candidate can (if she wishes) present a topic relating to her university studies



# Creative v Critical

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## Creative writing 2009

- ▶ **B2** Imagine you went on a long bus journey and sat next to Lou Star, a popular musician from the 1960s who is no longer famous. Write a description for a website called 'www.forgotten-stars.com' saying what he told you about his life and career. Describe his feelings about his life then and now.
- ▶ **C1** Write a short story for a writing competition entitled: 'Honesty is not *a/ways* the best policy.'

## Critical writing 2009

- ▶ **B2** Write a critical review of the writer, who in your opinion, is most in touch with the realities of the contemporary world and investigate how he or she is able to communicate them to the reader.
  - ▶ **C1** 'Italian design' is appreciated around the world, but what is it and what characteristics does it display? Write an overview investigating the phenomenon, referring to different examples.
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# What is critical writing?

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## B2

Can describe and evaluate a work of art (such as a film or a novel) or a cultural phenomenon (**especially with regard to current lifestyles in the society in which one lives**), **by synthesizing information and contrasting differing viewpoints** and using appropriate exemplification and effective structuring devices.

## C1

Can write a critical appraisal of a work of art, such as a novel, a film, or a collection of poetry, **or present a critical overview of a cultural phenomenon, such as an institution or a lifestyle, or of an economic, historical or linguistic issue**, isolating and developing the main thrust of the argument with some assurance, identifying supporting themes **or typical features**, and evaluating the work appropriately against the background to which it belongs.

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# Tensions (and synergies!) arising....

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Who relinquishes what?



## Problems in partnerships

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- ▶ Need to refine /redefine constructs
- ▶ Need to draw up a formal agreement (and who bears what costs?)
- ▶ Who relinquishes what?
- ▶ Who decides what?
- ▶ What happens when you don't agree?
- ▶ When does the local institution know best?

*In the space of a generation, Italy has changed from a country of emigrants to a country of immigrants. Write a brief overview of the phenomenon, showing how it is reflected in everyday life.*

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# Five years on: test impact

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The 'extra' value of the co-certification reflected in:

- ▶ perceived by students to be relevant to their needs
- ▶ 'local' element appreciated by students
- ▶ perceived by faculty to be a guarantee of CEFR level
- ▶ instrumental in reforming teaching syllabus
- ▶ possibility of exam promotion locally

***Can the project provide a model for further co-certification?***

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## *Global vs Local* language tests

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**Globally** administered language tests feature

- a 'standard' (UK/US) variety of the language
- a 'western' sensitivity to appropriateness of topics, *etc.*
- contextualization within a NS language environment

A **local** language testing need might mean assessing

- competence in a specific variety, skill, or professional area
  - less focus on topics considered suitable for global consumption
  - contextualization within a NNS language environment
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# Going glocal

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1 *a term that was invented in order to emphasize that the globalization of a product is more likely to succeed when the product or service is adapted specifically to each locality or culture it is marketed in. (Internet dictionary)*

2 *ugliness that ensues when the global and local are shoved uncomfortably together (Danah Boyd)*

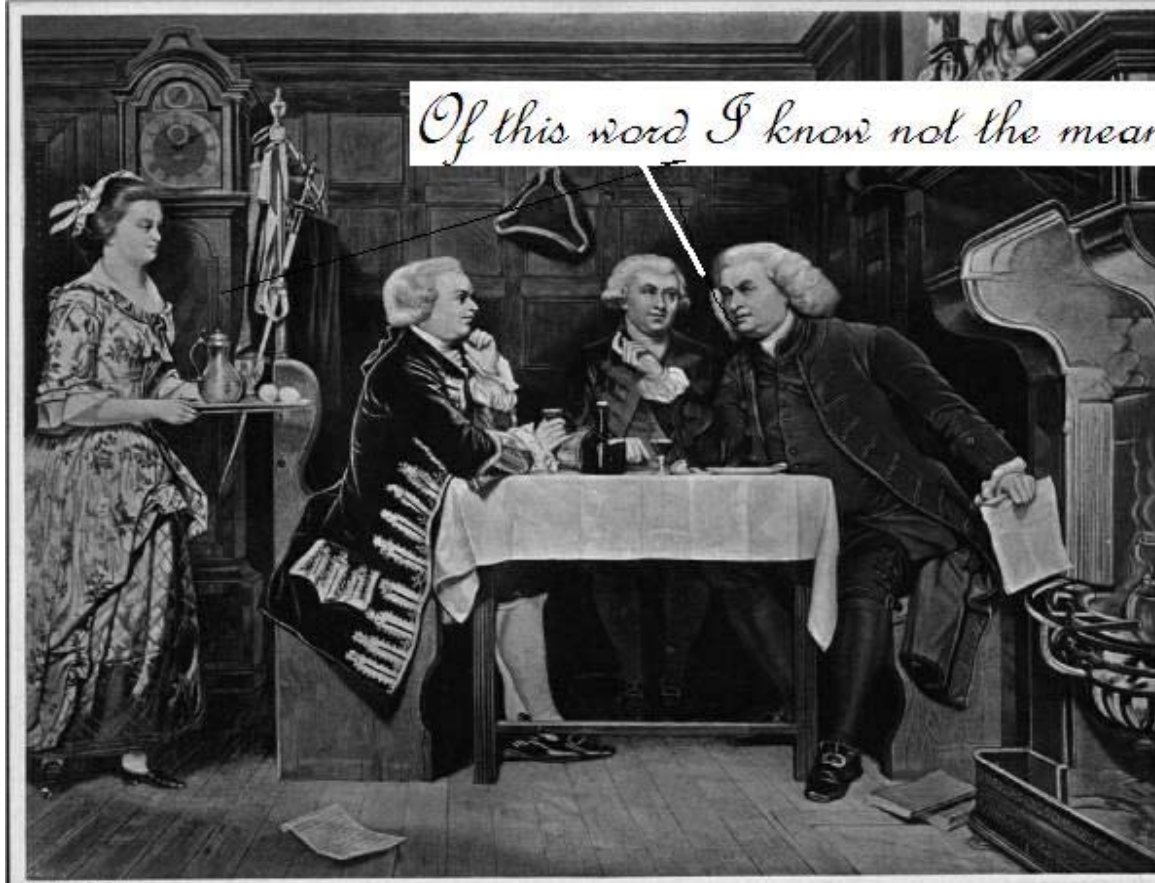
***The glocalisation of English will continue  
(Schneider 2007) and the glocalisation of English  
language testing will begin?***

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# Synergy

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**Lunch:**

as much food as one's hand can hold

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