

**EALTA Conference, Università
per Stranieri di Siena**

**Diagnosing learners' L2
development – an issue of
ethics in language testing?**

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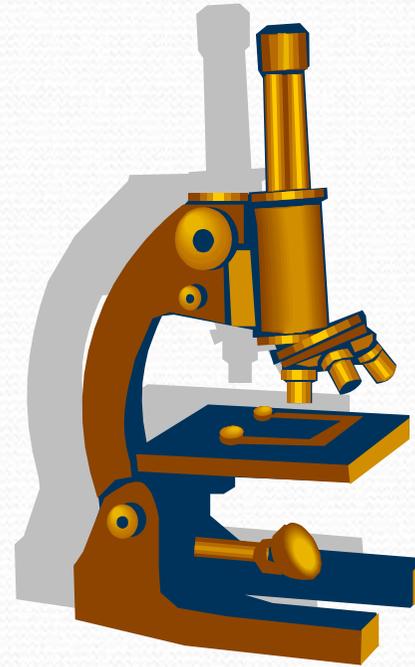
Overview

- Assessment Paradigms and the scope-precision dilemma:
 - Linguistic Profiling
 - Psychometric Measurement
 - Dynamic assessment (DA)
- Research Questions
- Design
- Analysis
- Open question

The scope-precision dilemma



maximum scope



maximum precision

Assessment paradigms

Acquisition metaphor (Sfard 1998): Learning as a process of acquiring knowledge within one person

⇒ Linguistic profiling: assessing stages of L2-development (Pienemann 1998)

Measurement metaphor (Borsboom 2005):

⇒ psychometric approach to assessing individual abilities, static approach to measuring traits

Linguistic Profiling

- Based on processability theory, which seeks to determine the sequence in which procedural skills develop in L2 learners
- computer-assisted on-line screening procedure of learner language
- diagnostic tool to identify a learner's current status with regard to grammatical development (not accuracy!) in the L2
- L2 English: Focuses on negation, word order, forming questions, verb (-ed, -ing, 3rd person sing -s), noun (plural -s, possessive -s), pronouns

Assessment paradigms

- *Participation metaphor*: Learning as interactive, dynamic process; understanding co-constructed in mediation with others and context

=> **dynamic** (e.g. Lantolf, Poehner) or **interactive** (e.g. Hamp-Lyons, Davison; Ahmed, Pollitt) approaches to assessing and developing understanding through mediation

Dynamic Assessment

Origin in Vygotsky's Theory of Mind, ZPD

- Children (and learners) develop through interacting with their environment, through mediation by an adult;
- Competencies or intelligence are not a stable trait but they are in flux and change;
- No gap between learning and assessment – seen as integral parts of learner development;
- Dynamic assessment aims at development, changes, internalisation of new knowledge and skills, potential

Dynamic Assessment

Definition

- Instruction or mediation during assessment
=> learning by assessment
- Mediated, dynamic procedure of administering assessment for the purpose of promoting learning, developing understanding, knowledge, skills
- Performance as joint activity (learner, mediator, task)
- NOT Feedback how to succeed in a task
- BUT mediated learning experience – targeted at learner development

Dynamic Assessment

Accountability: Poehner's Framework (2008)

Systematization to interpret interaction, to document and track development:

1. Source of problem (at which stage of performance)
2. Mediation (amount, quality of mediation needed, implicit - explicit)
3. Reciprocity (learners' responsiveness and engagement, low - high)
4. Transcendence (tasks near - far from original task)

Research Questions

- What sort of information can be gathered by the two different approaches
 - in relation to learners' current state of learning
 - and to their potential for future development?
- Can a combination of the two approaches yield a “thicker” picture to
 - give feedback to the learners and teachers
 - and to support curriculum design?

Design

- Picture description (information-gap) tasks with dyads of primary school children who learn English as a foreign language
 - to diagnose their development in L2 grammar
 - and their ability in L2 oral production
- Same tasks, assessed by the two different approaches (video recording?)
- Teacher questionnaires / interviews
 - Before: current state of assessment / feedback habits
 - After: evaluation of information gained by the two approaches

Analysis

- Linguistic Profiling: identifying grammatical structures that will presumably be acquired next
- DA: Analysis of interaction using Poehner's framework
- Comparison of information collated
 - Basis of feedback to learners and teachers
- Analysis of teacher questionnaires
 - Before: description of what teachers usually do
 - After: evaluation of our combined approach

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Thank You!

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