



It's not really about language: Language tests, citizenship and values

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STRENGTHENING THE TEST FOR AUSTRALIAN CITIZENSHIP

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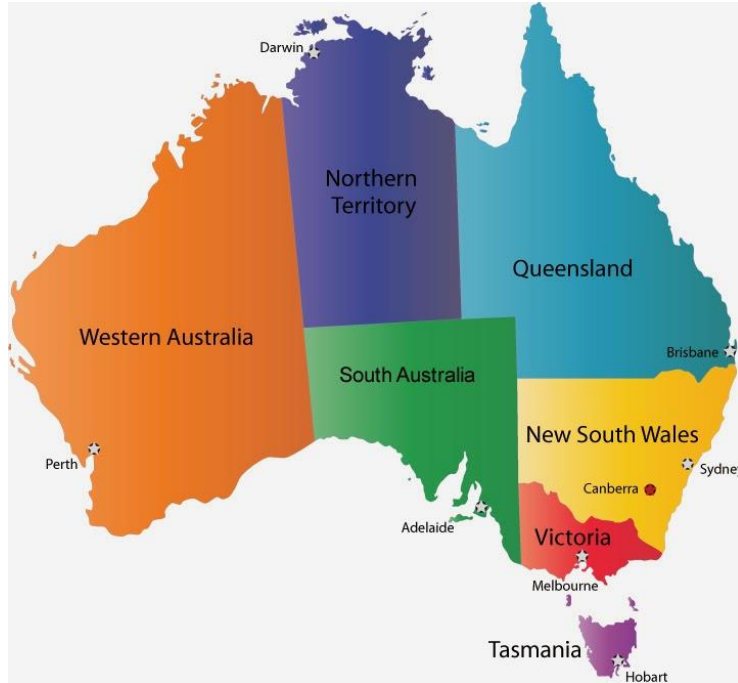
New, separate test of English skills

Pass level: IELTS 6 (= CEFR B2) in all 4 skills

Changed KoS test, focusing on values

New evidence of commitment to 'Australian values'

Current period of 'consultation' – what should language testers say?



(Conservative) Government proposals on language and citizenship: to counter rise of anti-immigration, anti-Muslim populist party in state of Queensland led by Pauline Hanson

White Paper refers to terrorist attacks around the world

Messick's discussion of validity is guided by a concern for 2 aspects of the reasonableness and defensibility of a test (its justification)

Internal aspect (J_I): 'FAIR' : is it capable of providing consistent and meaningful information about individuals? ('fairness')

('How good is the test?')

External aspect (J_E): 'JUSTIFIED': is its use defensible in terms of values? ('justice')

('Should the test be used?')



| | TEST INTERPRETATION | TEST USE |
|---|---------------------------|--|
| EVIDENTIAL BASIS (J_I – 'FAIR') | Construct validity | Construct validity + Relevance / utility |
| CONSEQUENTIAL BASIS (J_E – 'JUSTIFIED') | Value implications | Social consequences |



| | | FAIR (J_I) | |
|------------------------|---|----------------------|------------------------|
| | | ✓ | X |
| JUSTIFIED (J_E) | ✓ | Fair and justified | Justified but unfair |
| | X | Fair but unjustified | Unfair and unjustified |

Language testers can talk about **'fairness'**,
making suggestions on the margins:

Unreasonable B2 level

Unreasonable to test in all four skills – low literacy
applicants

Unsuitable test (IELTS)

Need for quality tests

Suggest alternative pathways via ESL classes



| Country | CEFR level 2008 | CEFR level 2014 |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Austria | - | B1 |
| Denmark | B2 | B1; oral B1+ |
| Germany | A2+/B1 | B1 |
| Latvia | B1 | B1 |
| Lithuania | A2 | A2 |
| UK | B1 | B1 |
| Estonia | A2 | B1 |
| Netherlands | A2(S)/A1 (W) | A2 (S production) |
| France | A1.1 (S) | B1 |

The tests are the outcomes of debates about social policy in relation to immigration and national identity

The level of language proficiency required varies across different countries, and across different times for the same country



But the politics of the test are only marginally about test **fairness**

They are mainly about what the test symbolizes politically – its values (i.e. **'justice'**)

What are the values in the test?





COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Aborigines Protection Act 1909-1943, Section 18c

General Certificate of Exemption

This document entitles the bearer JOSEPH EDWARDS to leave the reservation or mission at which they live- to go to work.

Additional benefits include:

Walk freely through town without being arrested (Note: Curfews apply)

Enter a shop or hotel (You may or may not be served- at proprietors' discretion)

Special Conditions apply. In order to gain this Exemption Certificate, the following must be strictly adhered to:

Speaking in native language – Prohibited

Engaging in dance, rituals, native customs – Prohibited

Associating with fellow indigenous people (including family) – Prohibited

Assimilate into the wider community;

If all conditions are met with and satisfactorily upheld, you may also be eligible to live in town unsupervised.

Note: Strictly segregated areas.

This is your chance to be free of the Aborigines Protection Act and live like a white man.

Dated the 10th day of March, 1951.

Issued by E. B. Meagher

Chair of the Aborigines Welfare Board

Use of native language

Cultural practices

Ethnic identification

Assimilation

Reward: 'free... to live like a white man' (up to a point)

Messick's claim about the defensibility of values in a test is an inadequate theorisation of the role of values in language tests

Current theories of validation cannot deal with the policy function of language tests, often the most important function

We need different intellectual sources to recognize and articulate values in tests