The construct of Writing

Claudia Harsch and Jayanti Banerjee
• Construct of Writing
  – Definition
  – Characteristics of written language
  – Theoretical Models
• Writing Construct in the CEFR
• Examples of Writing Constructs
What is a construct?

The *construct* is the theoretical definition of what it is we want to assess.

The *construct* is also the pivotal aspect for validity

– we need to define what it is we are targeting
– basis for test specs, blueprint to guide development
– reference for validation endeavours
“…there is no single definition of language ability that will be applicable to all situations… For each situation,… a definition … must be developed that takes into account the test takers, the purpose of the test and the teaching situation.”

Weigle 2002: 41
RECAP - Characteristics of written language

• Permanent – can be re-read
• Time for production – planning, editing
• Distance to reader – need to be more explicit (than in direct interaction)
• Context, communicative goals: production vs. interaction
• Communicative functions
• Linguistics realisations: complexity, formal style, vocabulary

e.g. Brown, 1994
The World of Writing

Brainstorm with your neighbour(s)...

- think of all the different kinds of writing we have to do
- what are the characteristics of each of these kinds of writings?
- what are the different things you pay attention to in order to compose a successful piece of text?
Model of writing development (Bereiter 1980)

- **Associative Writing**
  - Control Association
  - Written Language Production
  - Rules of Style and Mechanics

- **Performative Writing**
  - Social Cognition

- **Communcative Writing**
  - Critical Judgement

- **Unified Writing**
  - Reflective Thinking
  - Epistemic Writing

- **Epistemic Writing**
  - Written Language Production
Model of Writing Processes (Börner 1989, based on Hayes/Flower 1980)

PLANNING (L1/Lint)
- Content
- Structure
- Setting goals
- Developing

FORMULATE (Lint)
- Expressions
- Grammatical forms
- Orthography

REVISE (Lint)
- Read
- Correct

MONITOR (L1/Lint)

Planning Strategies

Linguistic means

Revision strategies

WRITING SUPPORT

Teaching Aims and Methods of foreign language writing
Implications Construct

• Construct should be theory-based and/or curriculum-based
• Construct should be aligned to your learning and teaching objectives
• Construct determines
  – Task demands
  – Assessment criteria
  – Levels of expected performance
Construct => tasks and criteria

Look at the different aspects of your construct:

**which aspects can you cover in writing tasks?**

**which aspects are best covered in assessment criteria?**

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**GCSE Language: Writing Criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BAND</th>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 5    | - Sophisticated and artful use of language.  
      - Impressive exploitation of form and purpose.  
      - Impressive structure which compliments ideas. |
| 4    | - Confident and assured use of language.  
      - Skilful execution of form and purpose to engage the reader.  
      - Well constructed writing. |
| 3    | - Consistently uses language for a clear message.  
      - Clearly executes features of form and purpose for effect.  
      - Clear and organised writing. |

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| 5    | - Impressive sentence variety.  
      - Sophisticated punctuation use.  
      - Impressive spelling accuracy. |
| 4    | - Confident, crafted sentences.  
      - Assured range of punctuation.  
      - Confidence with spelling. |
| 3    | - Clear variety of sentences.  
      - Clear range of punctuation.  
      - Consistent spelling. |
Writing Construct in the CEFR
CEFR Model of Proficiency

Communicative language activities and strategies

Illustrative scales in chapter 4

Communicative language competences

Illustrative scales in chapter 5
CEFR Scale Model

Communicative Competence

Communicative Language Activities
- Reception

Communicative Strategies
- Production

Communicative Language Competences
- Interaction
- Mediation
Hierarchy of Scales (Tasks)

Language Activities

Production
- Spoken
- Written
  - Written Production
    - Creative Writing
    - Reports and Essays

Interaction
- Spoken
- Written
  - Written Interaction
    - Correspondence
    - Notes, messages and forms
Hierarchy of Scales (Criteria)

Language Competencies

Linguistic
- Range
  - General linguistic range
  - Vocabulary range

Sociolinguistic
- Control
  - Grammatical accuracy
  - Vocabulary Control
  - Orthographic control

Pragmatic
Examples for Writing Constructs
Example for a construct (DESI Project, Harsch et al., 2007)

**Competences of Writers**
three intercorrelated variables:

- **Linguistic Competences:**
  - vocabulary, morphology, syntax, grammar: word-, sentence- and textual level, pragmatics (appropriateness of language in a certain situation), discourse and textual knowledge, sociolinguistic knowledge (style, register, variety, naturalness)

- **World Knowledge**

- **Strategic Competences:**
  - cognitive and metacognitive strategies like communicative strategies (quitting vs. reverbalisation, use of L1 vs. circumscription), planning strategies, test strategies, monitoring

**Performance**

- **Appropriate linguistic expression**
  - Criteria 5, 6, 7
  - Appropriate linguistic structuring
  - Criterion 8

- **Content**
  - Criterion 2

- **Planning, Structuring**
  - Criterion 4
  - Time management – Length of text
  - Criterion 3
  - Communicative Strategies
  - Criteria 10-12

**Task Demands**
forth variable, having effect on the performance, but not on the underlying competences

**Communicatively effective Text:**
- **Criteria 1 and 9**
- **Relevance**
- **Effective language:**
  - style
  - emotive language
  - narrative qualities
- **Recipient orientation**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Descriptors</th>
<th>Specific Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The learners can write coherent texts on familiar topics of interest (B1).</td>
<td><em>The learners can...</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. take notes if somebody asks for information or explains a problem (B1+),</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. convey messages, simple information and thoughts in personal letters (B1),</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. phrase simple targeted standardised letters and e-mails, for example enquiries,</td>
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<td>applications (B1),</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. write uncomplicated, detailed texts on a number of different topics on their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>areas of interest, for example reports, stories, descriptions (B1),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. write short simple essays on topics of general interest (B1),</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>6. write short reports on familiar topics, use them to pass on information, provide</td>
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<td></td>
<td>reasons for action and comment (B1+).</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>CEFR-Level</th>
<th>Task Characteristics</th>
<th>Specific Purpose and Text Types</th>
<th>Discourse Types</th>
<th>Output: Textual / Linguistic Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A1         | • very short prompts on concrete topics  
            • concrete, very simple and familiar topics  
            • all expected content points clearly stated | Specific Purpose:  
• ask for or pass on personal details  
Text Types:  
• write a list  
• fill in forms  
• write a postcard | • Narrative  
• Descriptive  
• Phatic  
• Simple expository | • very short and simple output  
• groups of words  
• simple isolated phrases  
• short sentences  
• highly frequent, elementary vocabulary |
| B1         | • short prompts on concrete or slightly abstract topics  
            • topics of personal as well as general interest  
            • expected content points listed | Specific Purpose  
• pass on information  
• provide reasons for actions and comments  
Text Types:  
• write notes and messages  
• write personal letters, simple formal letters and emails  
• write reports/ articles | • Narrative  
• Descriptive  
• Instructive  
• Expository  
• Simple argumentative | • short, straightforward, detailed texts (110-140 words)  
• logical development of ideas  
• coherent text  
• common, frequent grammatical features  
• task-specific vocabulary |
Given your background, discuss with your neighbour(s)...

• what **kind of writing** your students are expected to show (e.g. write a paragraph or a whole text)

• what **text types** your students should be able to write, and for what audience

• what **writing prompts/contexts** your students should be able to react to (e.g. what role is given to input such as texts)

• what role **linguistic knowledge** plays (e.g. range and accuracy of vocabulary and grammar, punctuation)

• what counts as **successful completion** of the task?
References


CEF general information: www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp
www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/documents_intro/common_framework.html

CEF English version online: www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf

Tool for familiarisation with CEF: http://www.helsinki.fi/project/ceftrain/index.php.35.html


