



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
National and Kapodistrian
University of Athens

European Perspectives in Language Teaching, Learning, Assessment Social Meanings in Global and Glocal Language Proficiency Exam Systems

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Beyond globalization and growth...

- If we admit that Marxism has failed us, and that capitalism is collapsing (as it only functions in a growth economy that's destroying the earth), we might see a hint of hope in the development of (g)local artifacts, produced in micro-economies, based on local self-sufficiency and fair-trade.
- Growth-oriented export/import economies are... the dream of the past, the shock of the present and the nightmare of the future!



Aim of the presentation

- This presentation views language exam suites, within in a broad political perspective, as ideological apparatuses, involving processes which produce, reproduce or resist mainstream lifeworld and educational practices.
- The claim made is that **International Language Testing** (and specifically exam suites for the certification of language competence) are monolingual-monocultural enterprises, interested in symbolic and material profit.
- A case is made for 'glocal' language testing systems (GLTs).



The notion of 'glocalisation'

- A glocal (global+local) structure is defined here as a scheme informed by the practices of others around the globe, but actually shaped by local social conditions.
- The purpose of localized operations is to serve local social needs and aspirations.



ILT and material profit

- ILT is a successful industry, which has grown immensely in the last 50 years, and is now controlled (like most successful industries) into the hands of international conglomerates.
- It has led to:
 - the commodification of language testing.
 - the fast growth of the language teaching business (producing commodities, such as training courses, textbook sets, teaching paraphernalia, multimedia, etc).



ILT and symbolic profit

- ILT has vested interests in sustaining constructs such as that:
 - languages are owned by their native speakers.
 - language is an abstract meaning system which can be learnt and used irrespective of its contextual use.
 - language tests are monolingual.
 - language tests are culture-, value- and ideology free.



The ideological nature of tests

- However, tests are not value- or ideology-free products, and exam systems are ideological apparatuses involving processes of ideologisation.
- Texts and images used in tests carry ideological meanings which, until recently, were not systematically investigated.



Representations of the world texts

- Analysis of texts used to test reading comprehension performance in 3 different examination batteries (one local or national and the other two international) revealed the totally different world representations of each system. (PhD research, employing detailed SFG corpus analysis by Amalia Balourdi, Faculty of English Studies, University of Athens.)



The world construed by CESOL texts (1/2)

- Cambridge ESOL (CESOL) reading comprehension texts construe an introspective world. Actants in test texts often examine and report their inner thoughts, feelings and desires, exchange feelings and ideas rather than material goods.
- Texts are inhabited by British subjects who go through interesting and intense experiences, having thus the opportunity to live as unique individuals and to advance their social and professional status.



The world construed by CESOL texts (2/2)

- The CESOL world is inhabited by Brits who are concerned in the personal, who travel and work in challenging jobs.
- Values of fame and success, closely associated with personal achievement and creativity dominate the texts.
- Texts minimize the distance between writer and reader.



The world construed by Michigan texts (1/2)

- Texts in the Michigan exams are inhabited by Americans involved in organized leisure-time activities which combine entertainment with the exploration of the history and culture of their own country, including the ‘classical’ American values put forth by famous American old stars and performers.



The world construed by Michigan texts (2/2)

- The Michigan world is particularly concerned with scientific research and developments, as the non human actants are mainly from the category of ‘science & technology’ and the relatively limited use of verbal processes basically serves the expression of scientific opinions, thus construing scientists as the most prominent Sayers.
- The most prominent feature of the Michigan world is its market-orientation with the implied reader often positioned as a potential consumer.



The world construed by KPG texts (1/2)

KPG is an acronym for the national foreign languages examination administered by the Greek Ministry of Education.

- A world with special concern for the environment, health and social issues.
- Social participants inhabiting the texts are ‘world citizens’. They are the texts’ main Actors, Sensors, Sayers, and Possessors in material, mental, verbal, and possessive processes.



The world construed by KPG texts (2/2)

- The human actants who dominate the texts are socially active citizens, activists, eco-tourists. etc.
- Text participants are experts; they are authorial figures.
- In relation to the reader, the writer is positioned as an ‘knower’ –someone who has better access to the truth and knows what must be done. The reader appears to be in need of valid information, advice and guidance.



ILT and the languages of Europe

- ILT offers services and is serviced by the ‘big’ languages, leaving the ‘smaller’ ones unattended.
- If people cannot be certified for their proficiency in language X, they have no ‘proof’ which is usually required for education and work and, therefore, no incentive for learning language X.



ILT as a monolingual-monocultural enterprise

ILT basically endorses the idea that:

- effective communication is monolingual
- proficient users of a language do not use 'hybrid' forms, mix languages or codes
- tests are (and should continue to be) 'a-cultural'



Testing and multilingualism: foes rather than friends

- The most popular language tests are:
 - marketed by the big language testing industries, which are monolingual projects with vested interests to remain so
 - those that classroom language teachers are taught how to make as exclusively monolingual instruments
- Both are intended to measure test-takers' language competence or performance in a single language.



Reasons for the profound monolingualism of ILT

- Language exams and tests are developed to assess (almost exclusively) linguistic competence.
- Linguistic competence is measured against the ‘ideal native speaker’.
- This is due to the fact that:
 - language teaching is still largely built around the ‘native speaker’ competence paradigm,
 - linguistic competence is measured objectively more easily.



Shifting attention from monolingual to multilingual paradigms

Given that the European Commission is promoting multilingualism as the key to social cohesion and economic development in the EU, the new challenge of the language teaching industry is language teaching and testing that accommodates multilingual concepts of communication.



Multilingualism and the CEFR

To agree with the CEFR (2001: 4): “the aim of language education [should be] profoundly modified. It [should] no longer be seen as simply to achieve 'mastery' of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the 'ideal native speaker' as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim [should be] to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place. This implies, of course, that the languages offered in educational institutions should be diversified and students given the opportunity to develop a plurilingual competence.”



The CEFR and mono- multilingualism

- According to the CEFR, the implications of such a shift have not yet been worked out and they have most certainly not been translated into action in either language education or language testing.
- In fact, the CEFR itself has chiefly been used so far for the validation and endorsement of the tests produced by international exam conglomerates.
- In practice, the CEFR has rarely served as a tool for the promotion of multilingualism or the enhancement of plurilingualism.



The European language teaching and testing industry

- Language testing is a big industry in Europe, which has been exporting language testing products beyond its member states, just as it has been exporting languages (its 'big' languages especially) and language services as commodities,
- Language exams for certification in these languages are available through exam batteries developed for a single language, in a monolingual manner, because to involve a language, other than the target language, would mean less profit.



More about European ILT (1/2)

- They do not involve adjustments to the cultural, linguistic or other needs of particular markets because this would mean that they could not be marketed as international products.
- They are usually developed by those who 'rightfully own' the language in question with the intend of measuring the test-takers' monolingual/ monocultural skills and awareness.



More about European ILT (2/2)

- The same is true of diagnostic, adaptive e-tests, self-assessment techniques and feedback systems, increasingly available, especially for the ‘big’ languages.



Are there alternative European tests?

- Besides exams and tests which operate within the formal educational systems, or the workplace, there are alternatives to the exam batteries of the international exams that the ‘big players’ produce.
- These are the (g)local language exam suites.
- Two cases in point are the Finnish and the Greek national language exams for the certification of language competence on the 6 level scale of the Council of Europe.



Why favour localized exams?

- Locally-controlled examination and testing systems can serve as counter-hegemonic alternatives to the profit-driven conglomerates.
- They involve adjustments to the cultural, linguistic and other needs of particular markets, especially when they lead to certificates required for hiring and promotion.



What are the advantages of GLT? (1/2)

Glocalized language testing (GLT) may:

- be provided at lower cost
- support the view of language as a meaning making system
- involve choices as to the representations of reality through text and image
- measure communicative competence by focusing on the user rather than the language as an abstract system



What are the advantages of GLT? (2/2)

- treat languages on an equal footing
- legitimate bi-, tri- or multilingual practices in teaching and testing.



GLTs in support of languages

Local testing systems may:

- cater to the needs of the local linguistic job markets
- treat languages in a comparable manner



GLTs in support of multilingualism

- GLTs can more easily make the shift from monolingual to plurilingual paradigms in language testing and teaching.
- A paradigm which has its basis on a view of the languages and cultures that people experience in their immediate and wider environment –not as compartmentalized but as meaning-making, semiotic systems, interrelated to one another.



The multilingual paradigm

In this paradigm, people learn to make maximum use of all their semiotic resources so as to communicate effectively in situational contexts.



What happens in multilingual settings?

- People use code switching and ‘translanguaging’ techniques, drawing upon the resources they have from a variety of contexts and languages
- They use different forms of expression in multimodal texts to make socially situated meanings.
- They also resort to the use of mediation.



What does mediation involve?

Mediation (as understood here) involves extraction of information from a source text in one language and relaying it in another language for a given communicative purpose.



Testing mediation performance (1/2)

- GLT are more likely to use translanguaging, as well as linguistic (and cultural) mediatory tasks, whereas it is difficult to test mediation performance through ILTs.
- KPG is a glocal language exam battery, which tests oral and written performance using multimodal texts, as well as oral and written mediation performance in English, French, German, Italian and Turkish. Source texts are in Greek (the test takers working language).



Testing mediation performance (2/2)

- Since the introduction of mediation tasks, systematic research is carried out at the University of Athens to provide valid illustrative scale descriptors for mediation performance in different languages.
- Research has shed light on discursively, textually and linguistically hybrid forms that successful communicators use, as well as on effective communication strategies



Research around KPG exams (1/2)

- MA, doctoral and postdoc work carried out around the KPG exams, using a variety of corpora developed at the UoA, include:
- Defining text difficulty and readability based on discoursal, textual and lexicogrammatical features as well as on candidate variables
- The affect of interlocutor interventions on the oral performance of candidates of different levels of proficiency



Research around KPG exams (2/2)

- (Multi)literacy requirements of KPG comprehension texts and tasks across levels and languages (English and French).
- The work has motivated the development of Greek academic discourse on FLT/T.



Financing

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Notes

Note on History of Published Version

The present work is the edition 1.0.



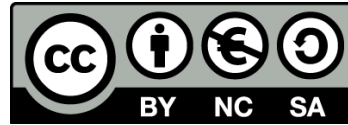
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