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Switching constructs: on the selection of an appropriate blueprint for academic literacy assessment

A B S T R A C T Tests of language ability are based on a certain construct that defines this ability, and this blueprint determines what it is that will be measured. The University of Pretoria has, since 2000, annually administered a test of academic language proficiency to more than 6000 first-time students. The intention of this test is to identify those who are at risk academically as a result of too low a level of academic language proficiency. If their academic literacy levels are too low, students are required to enrol for a set of four courses in order to minimise their risk of failure. The Unit for Language Skills Development at the University of Pretoria has now embarked on a project to design an alternative test to the one used initially, specifically with a view to basing it on a new construct. The reason is that the construct of the current test has become contested over the last decade as a result of its dependence on an outdated concept of language, which equates language ability with knowledge of sound, vocabulary, form, and meaning. Present-day concepts emphasise a much richer view of language competence, and their focus has, moreover, shifted from discrete language skills to the attainment of academic literacy. In this paper the abilities encompassed by this view will be discussed in order to compare the construct of the current test with the proposed construct.

Keywords: language testing; academic literacy; test constructs; accountability

The context

Tests of language proficiency are never made, nor are they administered, in a vacuum. This particular discussion is situated within the context of higher education in South Africa, where there is currently some valid concern about low levels of proficiency in the language of learning. Low academic language proficiency levels have indeed been mooted as one of the primary causes of the lack of academic success experienced by many students at South African universities. Academic language proficiency, according to Van Rensburg & Weideman (2002), remains a necessary prerequisite for being successful in tertiary education. The increasing

numbers of non-native users of English enrolling at South African universities without the required level of English language proficiency necessary for the successful completion of their studies (Butler & Van Dyk 2003) further compounds the situation. If, for example, one considers the number of first and second-language speakers of English and the relative success of each group at the end of their first and further years of study, it is apparent that a significantly larger proportion of mother-tongue students are successful.

A number of socio-economic and political factors, rooted in the educational policies implemented during the era of apartheid, have contributed to this discrepancy. In particular, Bantu Education policies have resulted in a legacy of educational deprivation for black students. As speakers of English as an additional language, these students represent the 'linguistic minorities' (cf. Cooper & Van Dyk 2003: 68) who continue to suffer the effects of a racist segregation policy and unequal distribution of resources.

The University of Pretoria (UP) is no exception to the situation described above. Since 2001 the majority of students at the UP who choose English as their language of learning use English as a second or additional language, and often have too low a level of language proficiency. Figure 1 indicates the proportion of non-native vs. native users of English as language of learning at the UP for the past three years (Butler & Van Dyk 2003):

Figure 1: Non-native vs. native users of English
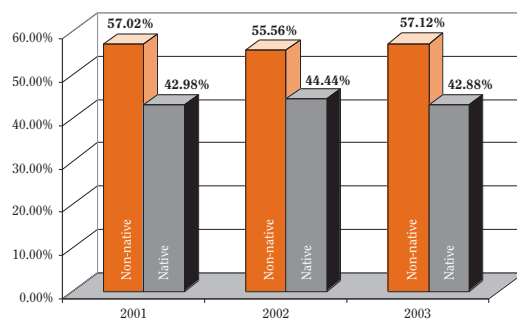
At the UP the problem of low levels of language proficiency among first year students has been addressed by the establishment of a language unit – the Unit for Language Skills Development (ULSD). The unit was set up in April 1999, and it is responsible specifically for the development of the academic language proficiency of students who are at risk. It is now formal policy that all students at the UP should, from 2000 onwards, be declared language proficient before obtaining a degree at this University.

The first task that the unit has is to assess new first-year students' language proficiency when they enrol at the UP. The ULSD has so far made use of a standardised measuring instrument, the English Literacy Skills Assessment for Tertiary Education (ELSA PLUS), that was developed jointly by the University of Pretoria and Hough and Horne Literacy Consultants, in order to determine specific levels of language proficiency. These levels are then used to ascertain whether students need language support in the form of an additional academic language development course (Butler & Van Dyk 2003; Weideman 2003a).

The remainder of this paper will focus on the testing of language proficiency at the University of Pretoria. It will deal first with the construct and features of the ELSA PLUS instrument, as well as the test scores for the years 2001 to 2003. Difficulties with the current construct are then highlighted and, after a consideration of the principles that support the choice of an alternative blueprint, the proposed new construct and its implications will finally be outlined.

Language proficiency testing at the University of Pretoria

Test subjects

It is compulsory for the approximately 6000 first-year students of the University of Pretoria to sit the ELSA PLUS at the beginning of every year. The test is taken during the academic information week (the week before lectures start) and the results are generally announced no later than the following week. These students form the population on which much of this study was based.

Description and construct of the ELSA PLUS

The ELSA PLUS test was designed and developed in South Africa by the Hough and Horne consultancy on the basis of their industrial and commercial test, the ELSA (English Literacy Skills Assessment) instrument. It was then refined for use at a tertiary institution in collaboration with the ULSD. In keeping with its origins, the test is designed to quantify the competency input levels and trainability of students who need to function effectively in an English language environment. The ELSA PLUS is a norm referenced placement test, where the first language user of English is used as the norm. It is a proficiency test; it is skills-based and not syllabus-based.

The ELSA PLUS consists of seven sections:

- *Phonics* (the ability to recognise and discriminate between English sounds);
- *Dictation* (the ability to write down spoken English and adhere to academic writing conventions);
- *Basic numeracy* (language use is integrated with an elementary familiarity with numbers);
- *Reading comprehension* (at elementary and intermediate levels);
- The *language and grammar of spatial relations*;
- A *cloze procedure* (the ability to create a semantic whole by completing sentences coherently); and
- *Vocabulary in context* (the ability to extract the relevant information from a given context to determine the meaning of certain words or phrases on a basic, academic and advanced level).

It is clear from this description that the test assumes that language ability can best be defined in terms of its structural components: language is, in this view, a combination of sound, form, and meaning. Also, it is assumed that language use can be captured in terms of a number of 'skills', in this case: listening, reading and writing. We return to a consideration of this below.

Some of the salient logistical and administrative features of the ELSA PLUS instrument are that:

- It is a one-hour written assessment.
- The scoring is done objectively.
- A diagnostic report is available for every participant after completion.
- It measures both language skills and language knowledge.
- It is culturally fair in that it avoids meta-language, colloquialisms, idiomatic expressions and dialectic usage.
- The test has empirical validity.
- Its reliability has been calculated as high as at 0.86.

Because the test is norm referenced, it is possible to quantify the language proficiency of a student in terms of school grades, i.e. formal years of schooling. All first year students who display an inadequate level of language proficiency (Grade 10 level or below, i.e. 10 years of formal schooling) as determined by the ELSA PLUS testing instrument, are required to enrol for a compulsory, fully credit bearing language proficiency course offered by the ULSD. Performance at a Grade 11 level or above currently indicates that no additional language support needs to be undertaken. This, however, does not mean that a student's language proficiency is perfect or that language ability does not pose a risk of academic underperformance for a student. Therefore, students not required to take the ULSD courses generally choose any other language modules offered by the School for Languages that are of the same credit value (12 credits) as the compulsory language proficiency course. This arrangement, however, differs from faculty to faculty, since certain faculties acknowledge different modules for credits.

Test data

Since the year 2000, the percentage of students with language proficiency on a Grade 10 level and lower has stayed consistent at between 27% and 33%.

The problem

2000 N = 4661*		2001 N = 5215		2002 N = 5788		2003 N = 6472	
≥Gr.11	≤Gr.10	≥Gr.11	≤Gr.10	≥Gr.11	≤Gr.10	≥Gr.11	≤Gr.10
N = 3356	N = 1305	N = 3495	N = 1720	N = 4212	N = 1576	N = 4615	N = 1857
(72%)	(28%)	(67%)	(33%)	(73%)	(27%)	(71%)	(29%)

Table 1: Summary of test results since 2000

There are a number of reasons why a switch from the construct of the ELSA PLUS test is appropriate.

The first reason is a practical one, and lies in the logistical constraints that the current instrument has: those who administer the test have to arm themselves with fairly sophisticated sound equipment, stop watches and the like, and should be prepared for a marking period that would, for this number of students, rarely be concluded in under 5 days.

The second reason is that the construct of the current test has become contested over the last decade, as a result of its dependence on an outdated concept of language, which equates language ability with knowledge of sound, vocabulary, form, and meaning. Bachman & Palmer (1996: 61ff.) have argued persuasively that tests should, instead, be based on an interactional perspective of language ability, which emphasises the negotiation of meaning within specific contexts. Similarly, Blanton (1994: 221), even in emphasising the nature of academic discourse as one in which written language is valued as currency, notes that academically literate behaviour involves interacting with texts:

> Whatever else we do with L2 students to prepare them for the academic mainstream, we must foster the behaviors of 'talking' to texts, talking and writing about them, linking them to other texts, connecting them to their readers' own lives and experience, and then using their experience to illuminate the text and the text to illuminate their experience (1994: 228).

To see why the view of language held by the test designer is so critical, it is necessary to take one step back, and consider that a test is always produced for a specific purpose, and that its results inevitably influence decisions about the future of the candidates that take it. Thus, the test developers must always "be able to demonstrate how performance on that language test is related to language use in specific settings" (Bachman & Palmer 1996: 61). Since language performance is interpreted as the outcome of language ability — the exact characteristic of the individual that is being tested — it follows that the definition of language ability is critical for test construction.

Definitions of language ability usually bring together two dimensions of our experience: the lingual and the formative. It is therefore not only language that is being defined, but the extent of the control that the individual has over language. The latter, formative dimension of language use is generally expressed in terms such as ability, competence, mastery and control (cf. Gee 1998: 56-57), capacity, proficiency, authority, power (Blanton 1994: 230), and so forth (for a review, cf. Weideman 1981: 195-204). Definitions of language ability depend, in turn, on the view of language held by the test designer.

For more than thirty years now, it has been accepted that the design of a language test depends on a broader, richer perspective on language than the views held earlier. This is a perspective that goes beyond a restrictive view of language that limits it to a combination of sound, form and meaning, or, in technical linguistic terms, phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic elements. In line with socially enriched views of language, such a broader framework for language maintains that language is not only expressive, but communicative, intended to mediate and negotiate human interaction. One may summarise the differences between a restrictive and an open view of language, and its implications for learning and testing as follows (Weideman 2003b):

Restrictive	Open
Language is composed of elements: • sound • form, grammar • meaning	Language is a social instrument to: • mediate and • negotiate human interaction • in specific contexts
Main function: expression	*Main function:* communication
Language learning = mastery of structure	Language learning = becoming competent in communication
Focus: language	*Focus:* process of using language

Table 2: Two perspectives on language

The table includes, under the rubric of 'Focus', a point that is important not only for teaching and learning, but also for testing. As Blanton (1994: 231) points out, language classes that foster academic literacy are classes where language "is not the subject of the class." This has particular relevance for our situation: we have learnt, for example, that we cannot accept that the apparent success at school in a language subject has direct relevance to the academic literacy level of a new student. This is related, too, to a point made by Gee (1998: 58): that the successful acquisition of academic literacy by children in the mainstream may often happen "as a surreptitious and indirect by-product of teaching-learning". Academic literacy, in this perspective, needs a

deliberate, reformulated definition, that is simply not adequately captured by a restrictive view that limits it to form, sound and meaning.

For language teaching studies and applied linguistics, the open and richer perspective outlined here goes back at least as far as the seminal work of Hymes (1971) on communicative competence, and a tradition built on this sociolinguistic idea that encompassed the work of linguists and applied linguists such as Searle (1969), Halliday (1978, 1985), and Wilkins (1976). For a generation of linguists that has been exposed to an emphasis on syntactic analysis, it is perhaps salutary to note that this broader perspective has been present in language theory for at least 60 years. Hjelmslev (1961: 127) had already in 1943 noted that, after a 'temporary restriction' of its field of vision, linguistic theory

> is led by inner necessity to recognize not merely the linguistic system ... but also man and human society behind language, and all man's sphere of knowledge through language.

The third reason for a reconsideration of the current test construct is related to the second, and concerns the criticism that has been levelled against a skills-based approach to defining language ability, and the effect that such an approach has on testing. We are in agreement with the opinion that looking at language as a composite of skills (generally: listening, speaking, reading and writing) is allied to an unacceptable deficit view of language, i.e. a view that, in language teaching, easily leads to an approach that proceeds from the assumption that additional language learners have a language deficit or gap, that can merely, or even ideally, be filled by teachers 'giving' them the language skills that they need. Such a view stands in stark contrast to one that says that language, also academic discourse, is a competence that should be acquired. It cannot be 'given' to a beneficiary as an entity. What is acquired, moreover, is academic literacy, as a specific (secondary) kind of discourse, in Gee's (1998) terms.

As regards language testing, we are therefore in agreement with Bachman & Palmer's (1996: 75f.) criticism of a definition of language ability in terms of skills. They note that one of the inadequacies of such a view is that a wide range of tasks, such as listening to a co-conversationalist, or listening to the radio, would both be classified as one activity ('listening'). They conclude:

> We would thus not consider language skills to be part of language ability at all, but to be the contextualized realization of the ability to use language in the performance of specific language use tasks. We would ... argue that it is not useful to think in terms of 'skills', but to think in terms of specific activities or tasks in which language is used purposefully (Bachman & Palmer 1996: 75f.)

If such criticism is valid, as we believe, one would at the same time think of academic language proficiency in terms of academic discourse, and conceive of the problem of measuring that ability as a problem of measuring the level to which academic discourse has been acquired. As Blanton (1994: 230) notes, we

> ... agree that individuals whom we consider academically proficient speak and write with something we call *authority*; that is one characteristic — perhaps the major characteristic — of the voice of an academic reader and writer. The absence of authority is viewed as powerlessness ...

The main problem for a test of academic proficiency is therefore to measure levels of academic literacy. As will become clear below, we disagree with the view that academic literacy merely

encompasses skills and strategies for academic success, or that it involves only listening, reading and writing, with studying and critical thinking processes perhaps thrown in for good measure. We believe that an enriched, open view of language and of academic language ability will, once adopted as test construct, significantly improve the face validity of our new test. Below, we explore that construct and its evolution in more detail.

The proposed new construct

Test constructs

The test construct or blueprint defines the knowledge or abilities to be measured by that specific test. As we have noted above, a construct is usually articulated in terms of a theory, in our case a theory of language, and more specifically, a theory of academic literacy. Davies, Brown, Elder, Hill, Lumley & McNamara (1999: 31) define a test construct as "... an ability or set of abilities that will be reflected in test performance, and about which inferences can be made on the basis of test scores". This definition emphasises a general point about all tests: in order to be valid, they must measure what they set out to measure, and not something else. In line with Bachman & Palmer's (1996: chapter 4) description of language ability, Douglas (2000: 111) defines a test construct as that part of a test that "makes explicit the nature of the ability we want to measure, including grammatical, textual, functional, and socio-linguistic knowledge, strategic competence, and background knowledge". Construct validity refers, among other things, to how much the underlying theory is represented in the test (Davies *et al*. 1999: 33).

Constructs of academic literacy

What would a construct based on a theory of academic literacy look like? In order to explore this, we considered first Blanton's (1994: 226) description of what proficient academic readers and writers should be able to do; second, Bachman & Palmer's (1996: 68) framework, and, third, an adaptation of this conceived of by Nan Yeld and her associates (2000) at the Alternative Admissions Research Project (AARP) at the University of Cape Town. All three of these are useful in various ways.

Blanton's (1994: 226) definition, which we consider first, is important because it breaks with the notion that learning to become competent in academic language is merely learning some vocabulary and grammar. If our view of academic discourse is a communicative, interactional one, then a test of academic literacy would value the ability of students not only to know and learn new vocabulary or grammar, but also to do the following set of actions ever more competently:

1. Interpret texts in light of their own experience and their own experience in light of texts;
2. Agree or disagree with texts in light of that experience;
3. Link texts to each other;
4. Synthesize texts, and use their synthesis to build new assertions;
5. Extrapolate from texts;
6. Create their own texts, doing any or all of the above;
7. Talk and write about doing any or all of the above;
8. Do numbers 6 and 7 in such a way to meet the expectations of their audience (Blanton 1994: 226).

The value of Blanton's definition is that it is broad and inclusive. As we shall note below, it echoes many of the components of and actions associated with academic literacy that are identified in more detailed expositions of this idea. For example, the notion of the student's own 'voice' comes out strongly in more than one component of Blanton's definition. Similarly, the language functions and abilities associated with academic literacy, such as extrapolating, synthesising and arguing, are either specifically noted here, or implied.

In the work of Bachman & Palmer (1996) we find a more detailed definition still. They define language ability (or the measuring of language ability) as standing on two pillars: language knowledge, and strategic competence (1996: 67), as in Figure 2 below:
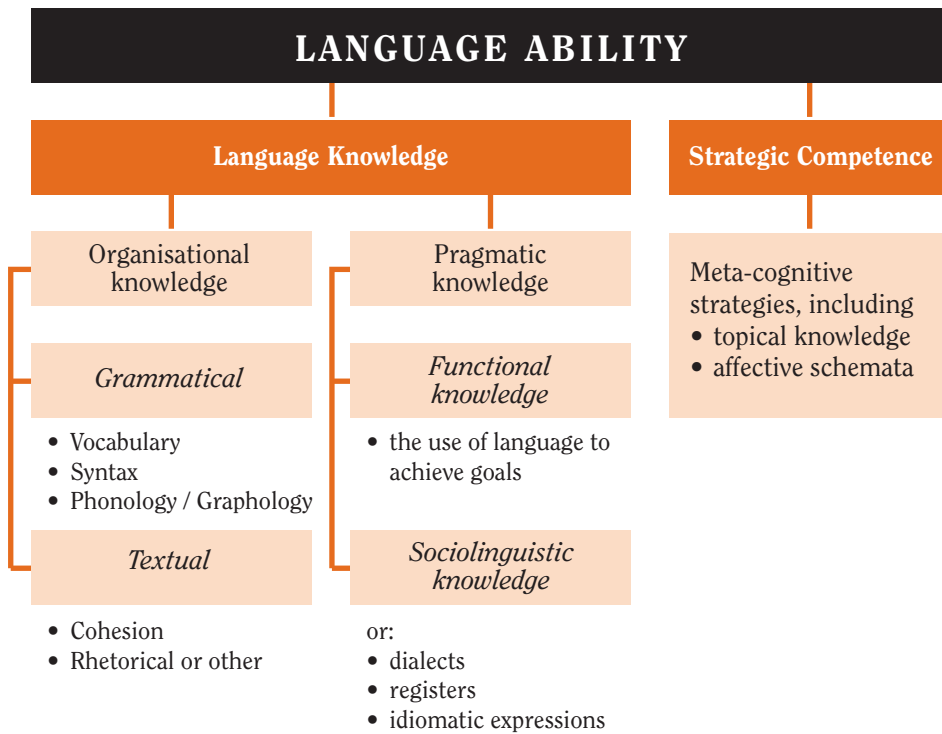

LANGUAGE ABILITY

Language Knowledge

Strategic Competence

Organisational knowledge

Grammatical

- Vocabulary
- Syntax
- Phonology / Graphology

Textual

- Cohesion
- Rhetorical or other

Pragmatic knowledge

Functional knowledge

- the use of language to achieve goals

Sociolinguistic knowledge

or:
- dialects
- registers
- idiomatic expressions

Meta-cognitive strategies, including
- topical knowledge
- affective schemata

Figure 2: The Bachman & Palmer construct

This more detailed exposition, however, immediately raises a number of questions. Can one, for example, really make a distinction between rhetorical organisation and functional choice? It is possible to separate the use of language to achieve communicative goals ('functional knowledge') from the use of idiom, metaphor and register (that belong to 'sociolinguistic knowledge')? How is choice of register (part of pragmatic, 'sociolinguistic knowledge'), in turn, different from the selection by a language user of a particular organisational form, which is classified as rhetorical knowledge? Furthermore, how is topical knowledge (under 'strategic competence') to be distinguished from appropriate choice and use in the situation (which, presumably, are the outcomes of sociolinguistic knowledge)? And, finally, how can discursive schemata (here, presumably, part of strategic competence) be kept apart from register selection (pragmatic knowledge) and textual knowledge (language organisation)?

This potential confusion is aptly illustrated by some of the interpretations by others of the Bachman & Palmer construct. In a recent review, for example, Brindley (2002: 461) associates the ability to achieve particular communicative goals with strategic, and not pragmatic, competence. As Brindley in fact also points out (2002: 462), the description of strategic competence is one area in which the construct has come in for criticism.

One may argue, of course, that the apparent seepage between categories in the construct does not necessarily make it less useful; indeed, Bachman & Palmer warn that, while the framework they propose may be valuable for any language testing situation, it would have to be contextualised and interpreted for every specific situation and use:

> We ... need to define language ability in a way that is appropriate for each particular testing situation, that is, for a specific purpose ... The way we define language ability for a particular testing situation, then, becomes the basis for the kinds of inferences we can make ... (1996: 66).

Such a reinterpretation of the original Bachman & Palmer construct for the specific context of higher education we find in the work of the AARP at UCT (Yeld *et al*. 2000). While retaining the original categorisation, the objections to which we noted and enumerated above, they have, importantly, added "understandings of typical academic tasks based largely on inputs from expert panels" (Yeld *et al*. 2000). Our understanding of Bachman & Palmer's (1996: 68) construct is therefore enriched by the identification, amongst other things, of quite a number of language functions (categorised originally as being part of 'pragmatic knowledge') and academic literacy tasks. These include: understanding information, paraphrasing, summarising, describing, arguing, classifying, categorising, comparing, contrasting, and so forth.

This reinterpretation is indeed consistent with the use of this particular framework by others (for details, as well as for a wider review of its problematic aspects, cf. Brindley 2002: 462).

Operationalising the construct

Of the three constructs described and analysed above, the most useful for our purposes appears to be that of the test of academic literacy developed by the AARP (Yeld *et al*. 2000). Both authors got to know this test at first hand, through our institutional collaboration with the University of Cape Town and a number of other institutions of higher education in developing tests for admission to universities all over South Africa. But in the latter, i.e. in the purpose for which the tests that we were jointly developing, also lay a potential problem: the intentions with which the test was being constructed were wholly different from the reasons why we required a test of academic literacy. In a word, the academic literacy test in the AARP suite of tests had, and has, to measure *potential* for academic success fairly, and has always been used as such. Since it is a test of academic potential, it must of necessity attend not only to language ability in a narrow sense, but also to cognition (especially the employment by the candidate of cognitive strategies). The measurement generally takes place the year before entry is sought by candidates to university, and the test results are employed to offer (or deny) places to such candidates at participating institutions. As such, it is a test that has immediate political implications and whose effects are potentially contentious in a higher education environment where access to opportunities for study is the watchword.

On the other hand, the institutional intentions of the University of Pretoria with a test of academic literacy *after* a student has gained access to the university make both the purpose of

the test different (to identify students already at university who are at risk), and soften its political effect. The employment of the results of the test also differs: the one is used to gain (or be denied) access, the other to be placed in an appropriate course that will help reduce risk of failure. In sum, the first is an admissions test, the second a placement test.

Since the former test is therefore a much higher stakes test, it warrants an extremely cautious approach. It is therefore generally administered as part of a larger suite of tests of academic potential (the AARP tests also include, for example, tests of maths and science comprehension and achievement). One of the effects of this is that the current language and cognition test within the AARP suite takes upwards of $2^1/_2$ hours to complete, and more than 3 hours to administer. Since our purpose is different, and — given a population of more than 6000 students who have to be tested in a single day — our time is much more limited, everything pointed to a reconceptualisation of how we would actually design our test.

Given the logistic and other constraints, the main challenge for us was therefore to see whether we could operationalise essentially the same construct for our proposed test of academic literacy. This operationalisation further entailed developing, from the blueprints analysed above, a set of appropriate specifications. Our experience in helping to construct a number of different versions of the AARP language and cognition test over the past two years has been especially valuable, and has allowed us to identify a number of the most productive elements of the original blueprint. On the basis of this experience, we concluded that we could with some confidence rationalise, re-order and reformulate the original blueprints, and come forward with a streamlined version that might make it easier to test academic literacy levels reliably within much tighter time constraints.

The proposed blueprint (Weideman, 2003a: xi) for a placement test of academic literacy for the UP therefore requires that students should be able to

- understand a range of academic vocabulary in context;
- interpret and use metaphor and idiom, and perceive connotation, word play and ambiguity;
- understand relations between different parts of a text, be aware of the logical development of (an academic) text, via introductions to conclusions, and know how to use language that serves to make the different parts of a text hang together;
- interpret different kinds of text type (genre), and show sensitivity for the meaning that they convey, and the audience that they are aimed at;
- interpret, use and produce information presented in graphic or visual format;
- make distinctions between essential and non-essential information, fact and opinion, propositions and arguments; distinguish between cause and effect, classify, categorise and handle data that make comparisons;
- see sequence and order, do simple numerical estimations and computations that are relevant to academic information, that allow comparisons to be made, and can be applied for the purposes of an argument;
- know what counts as evidence for an argument, extrapolate from information by making inferences, and apply the information or its implications to other cases than the one at hand;
- understand the communicative function of various ways of expression in academic language (such as defining, providing examples, arguing); and
- make meaning (e.g. of an academic text) beyond the level of the sentence.

As is evident from this definition of academic language ability, we have discarded the somewhat artificial, and certainly contentious, classification of the original blueprint. Yet the abilities described echo strongly, we believe, what it is that students are required to do at tertiary level. In a handful of seminars and conference presentations where we have offered this view of academic literacy for scrutiny, there has been wide and positive reaction. In light of the history of the development of the construct, a development that entailed consultation with trans-disciplinary panels of academics, this should not be surprising. The general response from our audiences has confirmed those of the initial consultations. This response has been that the elements identified above indeed constitute a number of essential components of what academic literacy entails. The blueprint presented therefore resonates very strongly with the experience of academics across the disciplinary spectrum, which indicates to us that we indeed seem to be on the right track. Further confirmation of this comes from the handful of other institutions that have either indicated that they wish to become partners in developing or using the new test, or have shown interest in assisting students in the same way as we do.

A distinct advantage of working with a construct as described above is the positive effect of wash-back (Brindley 2002: 467). In this case, the test already indicates what will eventually be taught, and the course reflects the construct of the test. This in turn improves the face validity of the test. Since the construct of the test is formulated in terms of a range of outcomes, in line with the outcomes-based approach that is now the convention within higher education in South Africa, it moreover shares with such approaches a number of advantages, such as a "closer alignment between assessment and learning, greater transparency of reporting, and improved communication between stakeholders" (Brindley 2002: 465). The issue of greater transparency is also the foundation of attempts aimed at making the test accountable, a concern that is now widely echoed in the testing literature, and to which we finally turn.

Accountability of test design

This discussion has focussed on the reasons for switching constructs in the context of testing academic literacy levels, initially within one specific institution, but eventually in a good number of generally similar institutions. It represents an attempt to clarify and contextualise the conceptualisation of a test, in the spirit of Shohamy's (2001) encouragement to language testers to examine every result of a test, and to re-appraise each foreseeable implication. In order to be accountable in any applied linguistic endeavour (Weideman 2003c), as this era of greater transparency demands from all institutions that wield power, it is essential that one begins by telling the story of the main instruments of exercising that power, in this case: a test. The wide interest that the new test has already engendered among other higher education institutions means that it will not be confined to a single, local context, and that its power to affect the lives of larger numbers of students may certainly be greater than initially envisaged. This alone should make a public description of how the test has been conceptualised essential. This article therefore presents the beginning of the story of this test: a history of where and how it began, and which considerations influenced its conceptualisation.

A next challenge is, of course, to find, from the specifications implied in the blueprint above, appropriate task types that reliably measure the academic literacy levels of students in our test population. We aim to report separately on these as we continue to develop this test, and trust that that will be equally helpful to others in testing academic language ability. Such task types,

however, never function separately from a notion of academic literacy, and the first purpose of this article has been to describe that as accurately as possible.

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