# Establishing a Life-Language Model of Proficiency:
# A New Challenge for Language Testers

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**Abstract**

In this paper, we aim to introduce Life-Language Test as a new concept in the field of language testing, drawing on recent trends in the field of English language teaching. To do so, we try to explain ways in which language testing professionals can revise and devise tests for measuring both learners' language proficiency and other issues which are of prime importance in their life. We first conduct a historical review of prominent language proficiency models which have formed the basis for devising language tests; next, we discuss the theory of Applied ELT, as well as its related nomenclature, which stresses the promotion of learners' quality of life in English language classes. Finally, we propose Life-Language Model of Proficiency which is an extension of previous models. After providing evidence supporting the construct validity of life-language tests, we contend that language testing is now ripe enough for a broader view of assessment which would include related issues from other disciplines. We further argue that language testing has a lot to offer to other disciplines and that language testers should adopt new roles as Educational Language Testers.

***Keywords:*** *Applied ELT; Construct validity; Educational Language Testing; Life-Language model of proficiency; Life-Language Test; Life issues*

## 1. Introduction

It is a commonplace to say that the way we test language skills is of high importance in language teaching and learning. That is, language teachers should be able to assess what learners already know or what they might have learned during instruction as well as how to determine learners' areas of strength and weakness; this way, teachers can revise, adapt or change their teaching

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techniques. Therefore, it is important to know what a language test should tap. Not surprisingly, much of such a decision as to what should be included or excluded in a language test relies highly on language testers' conception of language proficiency.

In the field of language testing, various models of language proficiency have been proposed: the discrete-point approach (Lado, 1961); the integrative and pragmatic orientations (Oller, 1978); functional language testing (Farhady, 1980, 1982; Upshur, 1979); communicative competence model (Canale & Swain, 1980); language competence model (Bachman, 1990); and interactional competence model (Kramsch, 1986). These models have resulted various assumptions about the anatomy of language, types of instruments, and characteristics of examinees, all of which are mainly concerned with assessing learners' language ability per se.

However, due to the interdisciplinary nature of the English language teaching field and based on the axioms of Applied ELT, which has been recently proposed by Pishghadam (2011) to illustrate the contributions of ELT to other disciplines, there seems to be an urgent need for the reexamination and expansion of the variables included in language tests. To put this more specifically, we argue that language testers are expected to become Educational Language Testers who take into account not only the essential language elements but also those of other disciplines which are the relevant and vital aspects of learners' lives. We propose the Life-Language Model of Proficiency as an expansion of previous models to be followed and Life-Language Test as an expanded type of test to be devised and used in the future by professionals in the field of language testing.

In this paper, we first provide the readers with a historical account of the most prominent models of language proficiency and their applications to the field of language testing and discuss the shortcomings of various definitions of these models. We further discuss principles of Applied ELT, Life Syllabus, and English for Life Purposes and argue that professionals in the field should transcend the development of language-only tests and devise and apply what might be called Life-Language Tests. This can be a new research line which may help evaluate learners' language ability alongside other life skills. Finally, we evaluate the construct validity of such tests in light of the theory of Applied ELT and give an example of this type of test in which both language-related and life-related issues are measured.

## 2. A Historical Review of Language Proficiency Models

Several definitions of language proficiency emerge from the relevant literature. These definitions, according to North (2000), have been inspired by advancements in linguistics and sociolinguistics such as Chomsky's (1965) linguistic competence as well as Hymes' (1972) and Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competence.

Largely inspired by the structuralist view of language which stresses the divisibility of language components, Lado (1961) conceived of language as a system of communication comprising various components such as phonemes, morphemes, phrases, clauses and sentences. Lado's skills and components model of language resulted new language tests which incorporated several testlets measuring disaggregated language components.

However, Lado's model, later known as discrete-point approach, was criticized by Oller (1978) on the grounds that the isolated conception and measurement of language components would not account for the wholistic nature and reality of language. Also known as Unitary Competence Hypothesis (UCH), Oller's (1983) integrative model regarded language as an integration of language skills and components. Such conception of language proficiency has led

to the development of three major types of language test including cloze, dictation, and pragmatic tests. Nonetheless, Oller's model seemed to ignore communication as an important component of language.

The linguistic and integrative models of language proficiency were replaced by a more communicative approach to language ability (Canale & Swain, 1980). Unlike previous models in which grammatical competence was given priority, Canale and Swain (1980) followed Hymes' (1966, 1972) resistance to Chomsky's (1965) oft-cited yet limiting definition of language proficiency; they proposed communicative competence which comprises three major components: a) grammatical competence, b) sociolinguistic competence, and c) strategic competence. Their model was then enriched by virtue of adding to the previous framework a discourse component including cohesion and coherence (Canale, 1983). However, the model seemed to lack a firm theoretical foundation; as Farhady (2005) has argued, even native speakers of a language might not be able to fully master all components of the competence. In contrast to Canale and Swain (1980), Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996) considered strategic competence to be separate from language competence. In other words, strategic competence was denied to be one of the four elements of language competence. By contrast, it was argued to interact with individuals' personal characteristics (for example, age, sex, native language, etc.), topical or real-world knowledge, and affective schemata. These components might facilitate or hinder learners' effective use of language and/or test performance. Bachman's (1990) conception of language ability, therefore, comprises two components: language competence (including organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge) and strategic competence (or a set of metacognitive strategies which help language learners engage in goal setting, assessment and planning).

A revised communicative competence model was proposed as a dynamic model wherein an interaction exists among various components (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, & Thurrell, 1995). Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) argued that listing all components without taking into account the interrelations and interactions among them is simply an oversimplification. Accordingly, they stressed the significance of "discourse competence" more than any other aspect of language proficiency. For example, Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell, 1997 argued that "the component in which (or through which) all the other competencies must be studied—and ultimately assessed—if one is concerned with communicative competence, which is not a hierarchical system of discrete competencies or abilities but a dynamic, interactive construct" (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, & Thurrell, 1997, p. 145).

This model also encourages the contextual use of language tests, stating that learners' academic performance can be influenced by their socio-cultural capabilities which refer to the degree of awareness, on the part of interlocutors, of the social conventions and values as well as learners' knowledge of the norms, beliefs and values of the target community (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). Such conception of language proficiency and its operationalization in language testing, as McNamara (2000) points out, makes a language test appear more as a test of identity rather than a test of language proficiency.

In 1986, Kramsch proposed an "interactional competence" model which views language proficiency as "an ability to process and negotiate the intended meaning, anticipate listener's response and possible misunderstanding, clarify one's own and others' intentions and finally arrive at a communicative decision" (as cited in Motallebzadeh & Baghaee Moghaddam, 2011, p. 5). According to Kramsch (1986), successful interaction is the result of a dynamic confluence of a "shared knowledge of the world" and a "sphere of inter-subjectivity" which are built through

collaborative efforts among all participants in social interaction. Nonetheless, there have been controversies surrounding the construct validity of tests devised based on this model, since it considers competence in terms of a shared knowledge among interactional partners; for example, as Fulcher & Davidson (2007) argued, competence cannot be attributed to a single individual. In other words, it would be burdensome, if not impossible, to separate each interlocutor's idiosyncratic language ability in a communicative exchange as well as their capability to demonstrate the relevant skills in handling a conversation. Similarly, Nunn's (2005) model of language proficiency highlights the communities in which individual members apply competence, hence the name International Communicative Competence (ICC).

In all, examining the history of language proficiency would reveal numerous definitions of the term, each of which has made alterations to its predecessor in order to enhance the way language assessors measure learners' ability to use language, with the most recent models being more comprehensive and sophisticated than the earlier models. However, these recent outlooks should be further expanded by the promise of a new model which has been built upon the doctrines of a new paradigm in second/foreign language studies, i.e. Applied ELT.

## 3. Educational Language Testing: Life-Language Test

Lately, the theory of Applied ELT (Educational Language Testing), proposed by Pishghadam (2011), has been on the leading edge of research in second/foreign language studies. Pishghadam (2011) argues that the ELT field has gained an independent and super-ordinate status among other domains of knowledge. This advancement enables it to be applied to and enrich other disciplines. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of ELT, professionals in language testing, like those involved in syllabus design and materials development (Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2012) as well as language learning and teaching (Pishghadam & Zabihi, in press) and teacher education (Pishghadam, Zabihi, & Norouz Kermanshahi, 2012), would benefit from paying due heed to the multidisciplinary nature of language. That is, language assessors would need to measure various issues from other disciplines (e.g., creativity, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, anxiety, and so on) which are involved in, and which may directly or indirectly influence the way learners use language or perform on language tests. Figure 1 presents the theory and application of Applied ELT to other domains.

**Figure 1.** The Theory of Applied ELT.
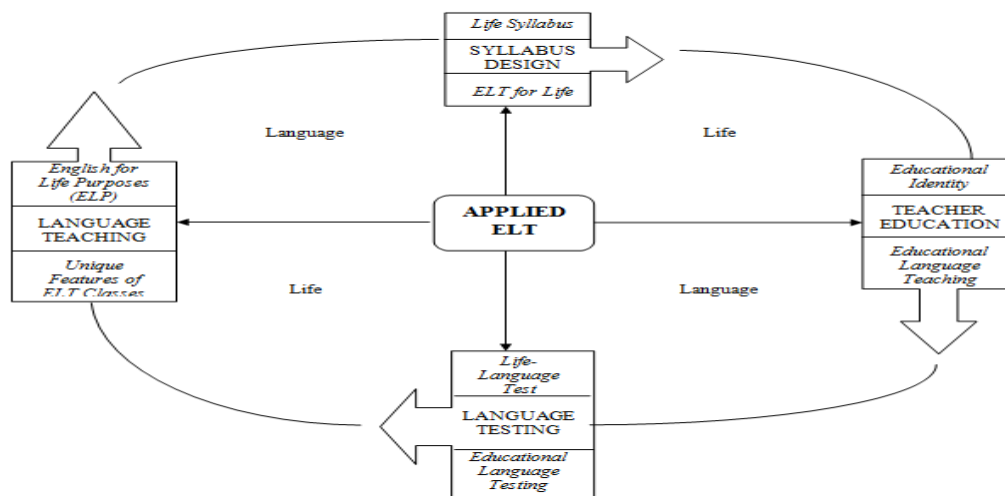
As Figure 1 shows, the theory of Applied ELT has caused several changes in: a) language teaching, b) syllabus design (Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2012), and c) language teacher education (Pishghadam, Zabihi, & Norouz Kermanshahi, 2012). Language testing might be added to these three fundamental elements. In the following paragraphs, we first try to briefly delineate the first three parts of the diagram and evaluate the potential applications of Applied ELT in the field of language testing. We further examine the fact that language testers can exchange feedback with scholars of the field of English language teaching.

First, language teaching has benefitted from the tenets of the Applied ELT theory in the sense that the theory has helped the ELT practitioners center their attention on the importance of enhancing life skills in ELT classes, granted that these classes have unique features of which other classes are mostly deprived (Pishghadam, 2011). Therefore, in line with the principles of Education for Life (Walters, 1997) as well as those of Human Development Paradigm (Haq, 1995; Nussbaum, 2000; Saith, 2001; Sen, 1989, 1990, 1993, 2002) and Humanistic Education (Dewey, 1897; Freire, 1998; Krishnamurti, 1981; Walters, 1997), the field of ELT has been narrowed down to include English courses specifically designed for enhancing life skills (Pishghadam & Zabihi, in press). English for Life Purposes (ELP) covers a broad range of life skills to deal within ELT classes including motivation to learn, emotional intelligence, critical thinking ability or creativity, learners' anxiety, neuroticism, and depression or burnout.

Second, Pishghadam and Zabihi (2012) reiterated concerns about the consideration of life issues in ELT classes by introducing the notion of Life Syllabus, arguing that the ELT professionals should include the aspects which are of great importance in learners' lives in the ELT curriculum, so that these aspects are pre-scheduled to be improved alongside learners' language proficiency. The application of Applied ELT to the field of syllabus design has thus called for a change of focus in designing syllabus from the current linguistic syllabi to life syllabi in ELT classes and a shift towards the use of the newly designed syllabus and the creation of a fully-developed language learner as a "whole person." As Pishghadam and Zabihi (2012) have pointed out, it is high time to shift the focus of ELT from the linguistic theories to a life-changing status, and one possibility is that life syllabi should be incorporated into the ELT curriculum.

Third, the theory has implications for the field of language teacher education (Pishghadam, Zabihi, & Kermanshahi, 2012). That is, the theory has made educators help teachers proactively construct and promote their Educational Identity. Therefore, the language teachers' identity has been expanded to help them become Educational Language Teachers; that is to say, language teachers should go beyond teaching language per se and extend their knowledge of other disciplines so that they can help learners develop as whole-person individuals; this would indicate the need for the development of appropriate teacher training courses.

Finally, in the case of language testing, the achievement of our goal to become Educational Language Testers requires that we try to understand and measure the psychological, emotional, and social needs of learners (through careful design of Life-Language Tests) and, as a result, share some impressions and feedback to professionals in other domains of the field of ELT such as language teaching and syllabus design who are responsible for designing and implementing appropriate syllabi. Hence, there should clearly be a kind of interaction among different domains of ELT. The dilemma in language testing would therefore become how to measure the life issues which have been included in the topics, functions, and tasks already integrated into our life syllabi and ELP textbooks.

Having received the necessary washback from language tests, as Educational Language Teachers, we should include activities in our classrooms that have real world applications to other disciplines of knowledge and, more generally, to learners' lives. Moreover, language tests may result in several modifications and adaptations regarding instructional programs or teaching practices. It requires that language teacher educators devise appropriate teacher training courses to help teachers acquire disciplinary knowledge; in this way, the content and quality of both life and language elements included in the newly designed language tests can be enhanced. That is, unlike the previous models of language proficiency whose focal concern has been the measurement of language skills and knowledge per se (e.g., Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1966; Lado, 1961; Oller, 1983), language testers should become enabled to simultaneously measure language proficiency alongside issues of primary concern in learners' life such as critical thinking and creativity.

For this to happen, we believe, language assessors should take on a more critical role to become Educational Language Testers in the sense that they would need to view language testing as a more interdisciplinary field. That is, they should incorporate issues from other disciplines into the process of language test design. This paper, therefore, seeks to expand previous models of language proficiency by offering a new framework for language use in life, particularly in relation to the development of a more comprehensive test, in part because a language learners' full potential, by definition, may not be completely captured by a language-only test and thus cannot be simply defined in terms of language proficiency descriptors or levels. Therefore, inspired by the assumptions of Applied ELT, we strongly recommend that language testers should become enabled to go beyond language testing through expanding their interdisciplinary knowledge of ELT. Our concluding remark in this section is that language testing should bring up testers whose role has been extended to be proficient both in language-related and interdisciplinary issues.

The application of the Applied ELT theory to the field of language testing will necessarily change the goal of language assessment from a language-only type of measurement to the incorporation of useful aspects of learners' lives into a comprehensive test which underpins practical life issues as well as language-related issues, hence the name 'Life-Language Test'. In this way, testing professionals can breathe new life into the field of language testing by virtue of taking an educational outlook to assessment and measurement procedures. In the upcoming sections, we try to establish the life-language model of proficiency and substantiate the construct validity of life-language tests in light of the theory of Applied ELT.

## 4. Establishing a Life-Language Model of Proficiency

As discussed above, language testers are expected to be proficient both in language-related and interdisciplinary issues. These testers would then be able to test language proficiency alongside several issues from other disciplines which may, in one way or another, affect learners' lives. Consequently, our proposed view considers language testers as educational language testers-- professionals who have been qualified in assessing language and relevant issues from other disciplines and have become competent enough to design what we have referred to as Life-Language Tests.

The model we would like to propose comprises elements from both spheres of life and language, and is called life-language model. Simply put, the model considers proficiency in light of the theory of Applied ELT and, as a result, requires that language testers incorporate items which tap

language proficiency as well as life quality attributes, for example, critical thinking ability of language learners. Considering the fact that life in this sense is a vast area and includes several life skills pertaining to a variety of disciplines other than language learning such as psychology, sociology, neurology, and computer, and that even these areas, say psychology, includes several sub-disciplines such as, among other factors, interpersonal relationships, ways of thinking, social and emotional intelligence, self-confidence, and critical thinking, we shall take only one of these sub-disciplines and try to incorporate it into the process of language test design. Therefore, in order to elaborate the application of Applied ELT in language testing, we try to operationalize our proposed life-language model of proficiency and to design part of a sample life-language test intended to measure both language proficiency and critical thinking. In order to make this happen, we should meticulously identify the different areas of language knowledge and critical thinking ability. According to Bachman & Palmer (1996), language knowledge encompasses two broad areas: organizational knowledge (consisting of grammatical and textual knowledge) and pragmatic knowledge (consisting of functional and sociolinguistics knowledge) (see Appendix, part 1). Critical thinking (see Appendix, part 2), on the other hand, comprises five broad areas including: drawing inferences, recognizing assumptions, argument evaluation, deductive reasoning, and logical interpretation (Watson & Glaser, 1980). To give but one example of a Life-Language Test to be designed by prospective educational language testers, we suggest a sample item which can be developed for the simultaneous measurement of learners' both language proficiency and one or two life-related issues. In the following example, the ESL/EFL learners are expected to read a short note about a seemingly improbable event and then figure out and give reasons as to how the event could have happened. The following example is about a girl who is on a sea voyage from Hawaii to New Zealand:

> While relaxing on the deck outside her cabin one summer evening, Vivian fell into a deep trance-like sleep. When she awoke, she felt as if she had slept only an hour or two, but it was now the middle of winter (Camilli, 2008).

The reason for such an unlikely happening can be that Vivian has fallen asleep on the deck of a ship right prior to the ship crossing the equator _ the border line between two opposite seasons. She went to sleep north of the equator in summer while still in Hawaii and woke up after two hours south of the equator in the winter while in New Zealand. (It is important to note that the distance between Auckland, New Zealand and Honolulu, Hawaii is 7057 km/4385 miles).

As the aforementioned example shows, the learners would be required to expose their creativity and critical thinking abilities through the medium of a second/foreign language; that is to say, they have to activate their creativity and logical thinking, and reflect upon their background knowledge, in order to discuss, in the target language, the reasons for the occurrence of such an improbable event, hence the simultaneous measurement of language proficiency as well as two aspects of life, i.e. critical and creative thinking abilities.

## 5. An Interpretive Argument for the Use of Life-Language Tests

Although many scholars have expressed serious concerns about the indefiniteness of the process of test validation (Campbell, 1995; Cronbach, 1995; Fiske, 1995; Meehl, 1995), the use of a test for a particular purpose should go through a thorough validation endeavor and should thus be

defensible from several sources of evidence. The evidence-based validation was originally proposed in Cronbach's (1980) work; it was further developed by Kane (1992, 2006, 2012), Mislevy (2004), and Bachman (2011). This model aims to justify the use of language assessments by articulating an Assessment Use Argument (AUA). An AUA provides a rationale for the decisions that are made in developing a test of language as well as a conceptual framework for justifying the intended uses of assessments. Different parts of an AUA include:

  a) *Claims*: statements about the intended interpretations and uses of test performance;
  b) *Data:* information based on which the claims were made;
  c) *Warrants*: statements which justify the claims;
  d) *Rebuttals*: statements about other possible outcomes or consequences that are articulated in the claims; and
  e) *Backing:* evidence to support the claims/warrants.

## 5.1. Claims

In this paper, we have made attempts to draw the attention of language assessment professionals to the theory of Applied ELT which is anchored in the belief that promoting learners' life skills should be taken seriously in ELT classes. The theory claims that ELT has already gained an independent status and, therefore, it should not be considered a part of linguistics anymore. That is, it should abandon the traditional linguistic syllabuses which are typically used in ELT. Therefore, the goal of the ELT profession should be to try to include useful aspects of learners' lives in the ELT curriculum to be enhanced. Accordingly, the consequences of using life-language tests and of the decisions that are made based on them will be beneficial for the society in general, and for language learners and language teachers, in particular. Moreover, language learners and instructors are the stakeholders who will be affected by these decisions. Besides, the interpretations about language ability are claimed to be meaningful with respect to the course syllabus.

## 5.2. Data

Although only a few studies have been done to examine the potentiality of ELT classes to enhance learners' life skills, these studies have provided some disciplines such as psychology with valuable implications to promote some psychological constructs such as learners' *critical abilities* (Pishghadam, 2008), *emotional intelligence* (Hosseini, Pishghadam, & Navari, 2010), and *national/cultural identities* (Pishghadam & Saboori, 2011). In the process of designing a Life-Language Test, it seems that incorporating language learners' characteristics such as self-esteem, motivation, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence into the process of test design can strengthen the measurement procedure. It seems to us that, if we put these issues from the two areas of language and life together, we get a reasonable idea of what the Life-Language Test actually entails.

## 5.3. Warrants

Warrants include the theoretical grounds of our proposed framework for language test development in the light of the Applied ELT theory (Pishghadam, 2011). The rationale for Pishghadam's proposal is that ELT classes enjoy several unique features of which other classes

are deprived. These features include, inter alia, the possibility for using activities which easily lend themselves to pair-work and group-work, discussing a large number of sociopolitical topics, making comparisons between the cultural peculiarities of learners' native language and those of the target language and allowing for learners' expression of their real selves through speaking in an L2. These special features have represented ELT classes as sites where different types of life syllabus through which we teach language along with other life skills such as critical thinking, creativity, social intelligence, and emotional intelligence should be adopted (Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2012).

It is widely acknowledged that the improvement of these life skills should be seriously considered in educational settings (Goody, 2001; Larson & Cook, 1985; Matthews, 2006; Noddings, 2003; Radja, Hoffmann, & Bakhshi, 2008; Spence, 2003). In many parts of the world, life skills education form an essential part of the school curriculum with the aim of helping students understand their own real selves, adjust both socially and emotionally, and become enabled to assess their abilities and potentials (Francis, 2007). Moreover, through life skills education learners can promote their decision making skills as well as their abilities to construct positive values and self-concept and, thus, enrich and modify their contributions to the society in which they live (Spence, 2003). Hence, the use of life-language tests would not only benefit individual learners, but it would contribute to the society. In effect, the use of life-language tests in the L2 contexts would help language assessors examine those areas of life where learners need more cultivation.

## 5.4. Rebuttals

Just as there are benefits to using life-language tests, there might also be unintended detrimental consequences, or rebuttals, of the decisions that are made. For the purpose of designing life-language tests, first we must see what particular life skill is going to be enhanced; then, we should try to incorporate dimensions of this particular life skill into the items on a language test. For example, if language testers wish to measure learners' critical thinking and language proficiency simultaneously, they are expected to devise language tests to tap critical thinking in the guise of language test items. Accordingly, if learners' critical thinking is not assessed in an implied manner, learners' knowledge that their critical thinking abilities are being measured by the test might affect their performance. Moreover, there is the possibility that an abrupt shift toward, and continued use of, life-language tests may endanger the face validity of these tests which, to a great extent, were previously centered on assessing language proficiency of the learners. Or, the consequences of possession/dispossession of life skills decisions about learners will be detrimental for them, not to mention the negative consequences of using inexperienced language testers who lack knowledge of the ways through which these life skills can be measured.

## 5.5. Backing

Testing professionals should empirically examine the validity of the uses and interpretations of the scores of these tests in relation to the theory of Applied ELT and, consequently, amend the test items which are most in need of clarification, emendation, or alteration. Of particular interest in building the validity argument of life-language tests is the extent to which these life-language tests do actually measure what the theory claims they do. Similarly, test developers should

investigate the extent to which scores from a test of both language knowledge and life skills can be interpreted as indicators of test takers' ability in those domains. As a result, the psychometric properties of the life-language test should be looked at carefully to confirm, or disconfirm, whether a life-language test measures a postulated 'life + language' ability.

These properties are to be examined through testing the relationships between these tests and measures of other constructs such as Bar On's EQ questionnaire and Torrance test of creativity which the newly designed test is theoretically predicted to correlate with. Thus we applaud efforts on the part of other interested researchers to bridge the gap between the theoretical and empirical aspects of the validation of life-language tests and, at the same time, to evaluate the utility and appropriateness of the current language tests in the concurrent measurement of language and life skills.

## 6. Sporadic Existing Examples: A Need for Constancy

In this section, we draw the readers' attention to some existing instances of Life-Language Test in which language and life are measured simultaneously. We believe that some parts of the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) and Scholastic Assessment Tests (SAT)—standardized tests primarily designed for assessing learners' readiness to attend college in the US—are consistent with the definition of Life-Language Tests. As a case in point, the analogy section of GRE seems to measure both critical thinking and language proficiency. The test items in this section are vocabulary questions which typically tap learners' understanding of the relationships among words and ideas. Learners are provided with a pair of words and are supposed to select another pair which is related in the same way. The relationship between the two words in the pair may be, among many other possibilities, a synonymy, cause and effect or tool-worker relationship. An example of such analogy questions is shown below:

FLAG: ENERGY:
□ explore: insight
■ falter: determination
□ focus: strength
□ kindle: enthusiasm
□ bore: tedium (Green & Wolf, 2005, p. 10)

To answer this question, the examinee should know that when energy flags, it weakens or grows less. Similarly, when a person's determination falters, it tends to weaken or grow less. This type of question seems to invoke critical thinking on the part of learners in that they have to reason and think reflectively in order to figure out some sort of relationship between various sets of seemingly unrelated ideas.

Moreover, the first section of SAT examinations is intended to test learners' critical reading ability. These items include sentence completion and questions about reading passages of various lengths. The major part of the critical reading section in SAT examinations comprises items concerning reading passages in which students read texts on humanities, social sciences and personal narratives and are asked to answer questions based on the reading passage. Some sections contain texts requiring that the learner compare two related passages; this, in turn, seems to measure learners' critical thinking abilities, considering the fact that critical thinking is the cornerstone of critical reading.

Therefore, it is clear how both language proficiency and psychological aspects of learners' life, i.e., critical thinking, are measured via the development and administration of these two standardized tests. However, even these examples cannot be regarded as perfect prototypes of a Life-Language Test since they tap learners' critical thinking abilities only sporadically and marginally. In other words, we cannot ascertain whether the GRE, SAT, and ACT capture students' full potentials. This is explicitly stated by testing agencies that strongly recommend admissions committees consider other sources of evidence as well. Even if they do measure some life skills, GRE and SAT are designed for native speakers of English or highly proficient second language (L2) learners at the graduate level. Therefore, we argue that what we need in *educational* language testing is to design tests in which the contents and the exercises all center their attention on the measurement of, say, emotional intelligence or critical thinking of L2 learners as well as their language proficiency.

As earlier noted, we by no means mean that the existing tests do not consider issues other than language proficiency; rather, what we wish to convey is that we need *constancy*, *uniformity,* and *regularity* in designing such tests. Accordingly, commonly used tests of language proficiency such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) ought to be modified, not completely skipped out on, due to the fact that these tests are specifically designed to measure learners' language proficiency, and there seems to be a need that the professionals in the field of language testing come to the scene and incorporate aspects of other domains of knowledge as variables to be measured in forthcoming life-language tests.

## 7. Conclusions

Before reshaping language tests, it is necessary to demonstrate what skills they fail to engage; why it is important to engage the missing skills; and how such tests would be developed and validated. Rather than presenting our model as a replacement for previous models, we suggest that it is an extension of previous ways of thinking about what needs to be assessed in language use. Therefore, we do not intend to dispose of the useful parts of other existing tests. In this paper we made an attempt to expand the current conceptualization of tests of language proficiency that has dominated literature for decades. Largely inspired by the theory of Applied ELT (Pishghadam, 2011), we represented a significant departure from the prevailing views in language testing and argued that language assessment should go beyond the current phase in which language is considered the sole variable to be measured in a language program (Lado, 1961; Oller, 1978; Upshur, 1979; Farhady, 1980; Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990; Kramsch, 1986). We endorse a broader view of assessment under the rubrics of Educational Language Testing which includes the important aspects of other disciplines as well.

Such an enterprise requires that language assessors adopt a more critical role as Educational *Language Testers* in the sense that, based on the *Life-Language Model of Proficiency* introduced in this paper, they should enhance their knowledge of other disciplines as well as their language testing expertise in order to incorporate beneficial aspects of these disciplines into a comprehensive test of 'life + language' which we referred to as *Life-Language Test*. The proposed model comprises different abilities that a language learner should have in order to be able to take a life-language test specifically designed to measure both language proficiency and, say, critical thinking.

In this connection, language testers are expected to engage themselves in the critical act of mixing life and language issues in appropriate ways. Accordingly, based on Bachman and Palmer's (1996) language knowledge framework and Watson and Glaser's (1980) critical thinking appraisal, we discussed the areas which should be measured in a sample life-language test intended to measure learners' both language proficiency and critical thinking. We then justified the use of life-language tests through the articulation of an Assessment Use Argument (Bachman & Palmer, 2010).

Moreover, although there are some existing tests such as GRE and SAT which try to measure life issues under the rubrics of language tests, the issues which these tests deal with are limited in number and are used either sporadically or marginally. Therefore, as suggested, there is a need for *constancy* and *deliberation* in designing such tests--a procedure which should be followed with care and precision. For this to happen, we strongly recommend that life issues should be taken into account in test design as core, rather than peripheral, skills in which learners are expected to achieve excellence. For example, critical thinking, which is an important psychological trait, may be measured via the proper design and application of a test specifically developed for the purpose of the concurrent assessment of learners' critical thinking and language proficiency. Such a test may incorporate questions such as context, temporal order, particular events, intentions, choices, meaning (meta-discourse message), and telling (Fisher, 2003, cited in Jarvis, 2005) which tap language learners' critical thinking, since they require that the examinees disclose their critical thinking abilities through the use of an L2.

Nonetheless, the difference between teaching, learning, and assessment is that unlike the continual processes of teaching and learning, we cannot continue assessment for a long period of time. That is, assessment has logistic limitations. That is why some of the innovations in language testing such as *dynamic assessment* have not been implemented in high-stakes test contexts. It seems to us that if future research focuses on the context of *formative* classroom assessment, it may have its own merits, as the ideas presented here might also have great potentials for *assessments for learning*. We hope that the ideas presented here are helpful, although we believe that the underlying important message would need to be further developed and empirically evidenced.

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## Appendix

*Areas of a Sample Life-language Test (Part 1 adapted from Bachman & Palmer, 1996)*

| **1. Areas of Language Knowledge** |
| --- |
| **1.1. Organizational knowledge** (how utterances or sentences and texts are organized) |
| *Grammatical knowledge* (how individual utterances or sentences are organized) |
| Knowledge of vocabulary |
| Knowledge of syntax |
| Knowledge of phonology/graphology |
| *Textual knowledge* (how utterances or sentences are organized to form texts) |
| Knowledge of cohesion |
| Knowledge of rhetorical or conversational organization |
| **1.2. Pragmatic knowledge** (how utterances or sentences and texts are related to the communicative goals of the language user and to the features of the language use setting) |
| *Functional knowledge* (how utterances or sentences and texts are related to the communicative goals of language users) |
| Knowledge of ideational functions |
| Knowledge of manipulative functions |

| |
|---|
| Knowledge of heuristic functions |
| Knowledge of imaginative functions |
| *Sociolinguistic knowledge* (how utterances or sentences and texts are related to the features of the language use setting) |
| Knowledge of dialects/varieties |
| Knowledge of registers |
| Knowledge of natural or idiomatic expressions |
| Knowledge of cultural references and figures of speech |
| **2. Areas of Critical Thinking Ability** |
| **2.1. Drawing inferences** (how to evaluate the validity of inferences drawn from a series of factual statements) |
| the ability to arrive at conclusions |
| the ability to evaluate the validity of inferences that logically follow from the available evidence |
| the ability to evaluate all relevant information before drawing a conclusion |
| the ability to judge the plausibility of different conclusions |
| the ability to select the most appropriate conclusion |
| the ability to avoid overgeneralization beyond the evidence |
| **2.2. Recognizing assumptions** (how to identify unstated assumptions or presuppositions in a series of assertive statements) |
| the ability to discover information gaps |
| the ability to recognize assumptions in presentations, strategies, plans, and ideas |
| the ability to be aware of assumptions and directly assessing their appropriateness to the situation |
| the ability to evaluate the merits of a proposal, policy, or practice |
| **2.3. Argument evaluation** (how to distinguish between arguments that are strong and relevant and those that are weak or irrelevant to a particular question at issue) |
| the ability to analyze arguments objectively and accurately |
| the ability to determine whether to believe arguments or act accordingly |
| the ability to overcome a confirmation bias |
| the ability to control emotions |
| **2.4. Deductive reasoning** (how to determine whether certain conclusions necessarily follow from the information in given statements or premises) |
| the ability to move from theory to observations or findings |
| the ability to create a specific conclusion from a generalization |
| the ability to properly identify the members of a class of things at issue |
| **2.5. Logical interpretation** (how to weigh evidence and decide if generalizations or conclusions based on the given data are warranted) |
| the ability to distinguish between strong and weak arguments |
| the ability to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant arguments |