

The B2 level and its applicability in university entrance tests

Cecilie Hamnes Carlsen – VOX

Bart Deygers – CLE (KULeuven)

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Norwegian study

Belgian study

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The blurry construct of LAP

Language for academic purposes

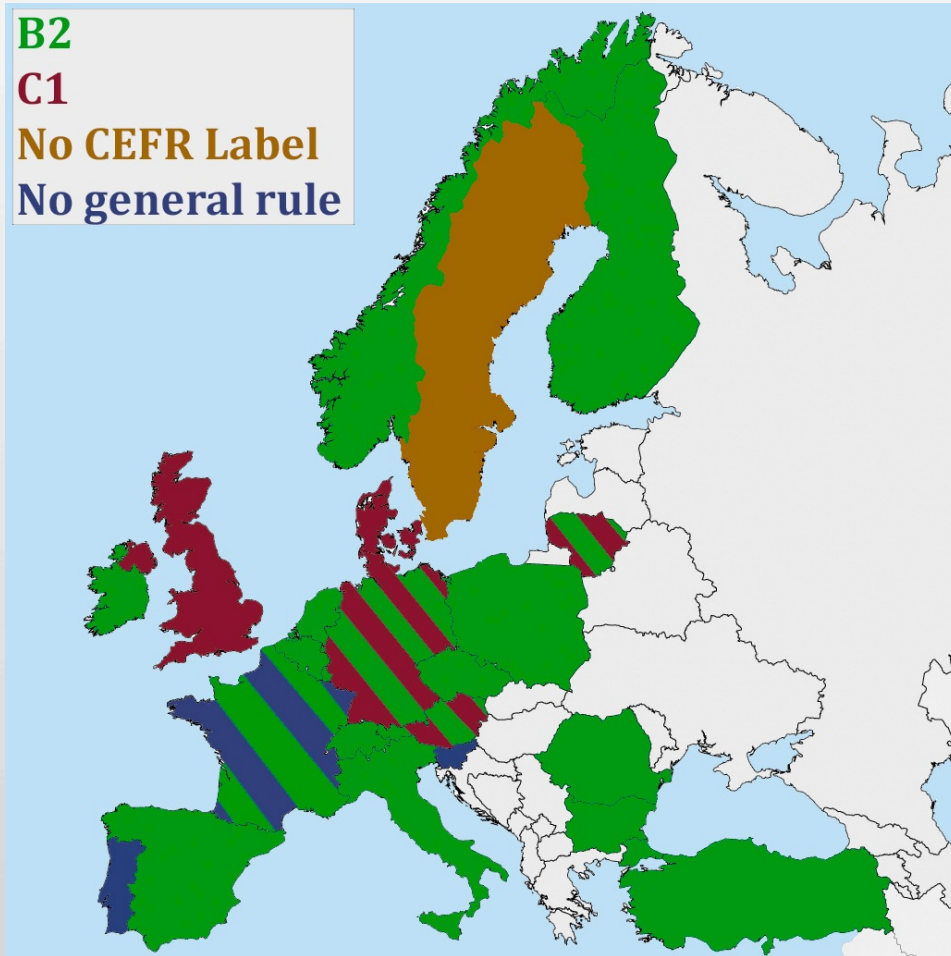
Consensus:

- Argumentative skills
- Summarizing skills
- Integrated skills
- Context and content-heavy

No consensus:

- Skills & level
- Context of use
- Role of cognition
- Users

About that level



In Europe:

- Language is often a prerequisite for university admission
- B2 is the most common level
- But there is no uniform policy

And about that skill set

What makes a test into an LAP test?

Probably:

Giving presentations

Including graphs & tables

Understanding lectures

Summarizing texts

Building argumentation

And about that context

What does LAP refer to?

All language used:

in teaching

in academic teaching

in science

in acquiring new knowledge

...

Challenges

- #1 Is B2 appropriate as the threshold level for university entrance?
- #2 What language skills should be part of a university entrance test?
- #3 What is the appropriate context to focus on?

Introducing two studies

| | Norwegian study | Belgian study |
|----------------|--|--|
| RQ | What proficiency level is sufficient to succeed at university? | Which linguistic skills are expected on day 1? |
| Context of use | University, throughout university studies | University, day 1 |
| Method | Quantitative: Self-reporting & entrance test score | Qualitative: Focus groups |
| Population | L2 students (N = 449) | Academic teaching staff (N = 24) |

The Norwegian study

Context

Different locally developed university entrance tests

One national standardized test

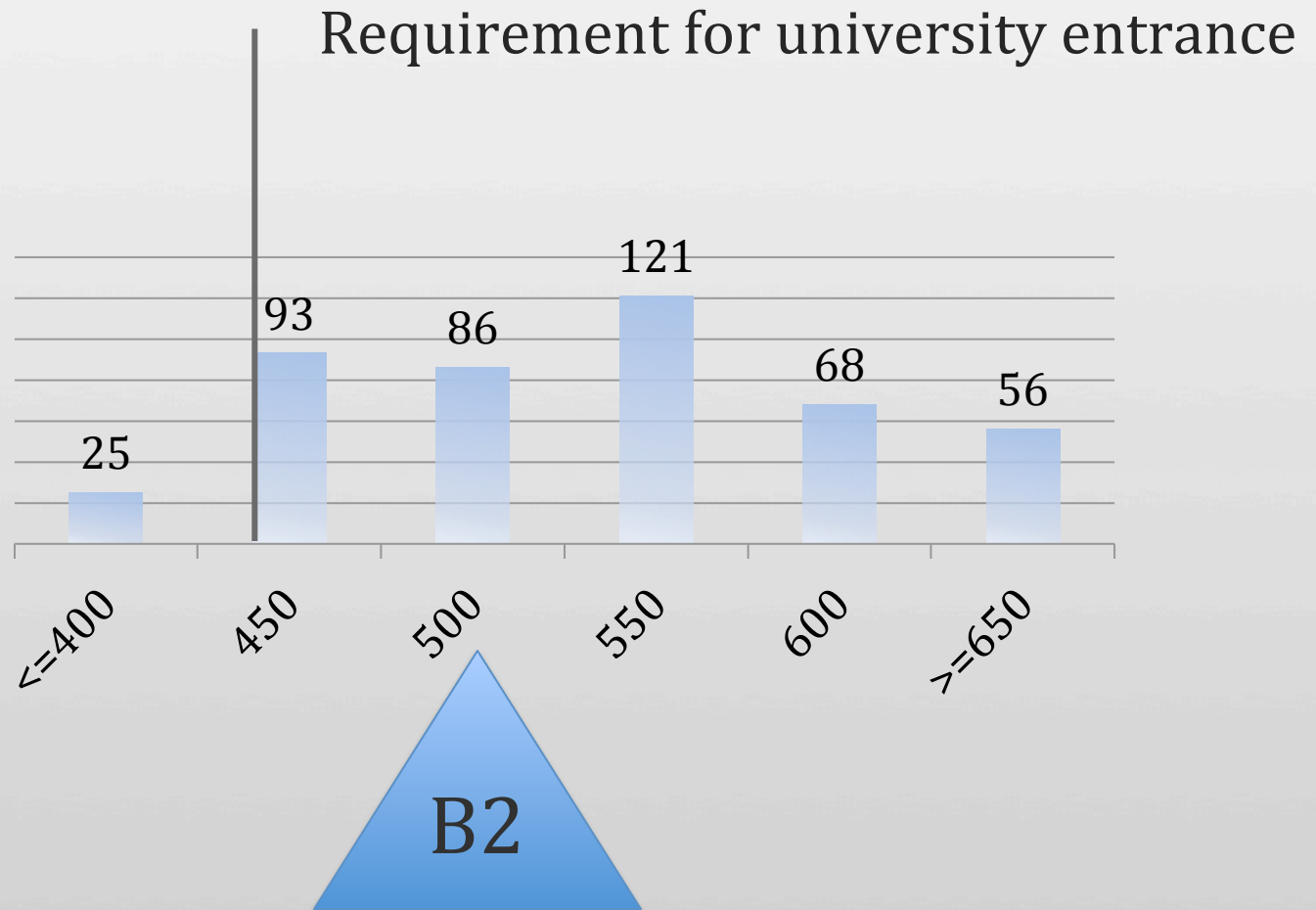
(CEFR-linked; contains writing, reading & listening)

(Test i norsk – høyere nivå, “Bergenstesten”)

Main focus

What proficiency level is sufficient to succeed at university?

The Norwegian study



The Norwegian study

Questions about sub skills

Listening to lectures

Reading curriculum literature

Writing tasks & exam papers

Speaking in a group

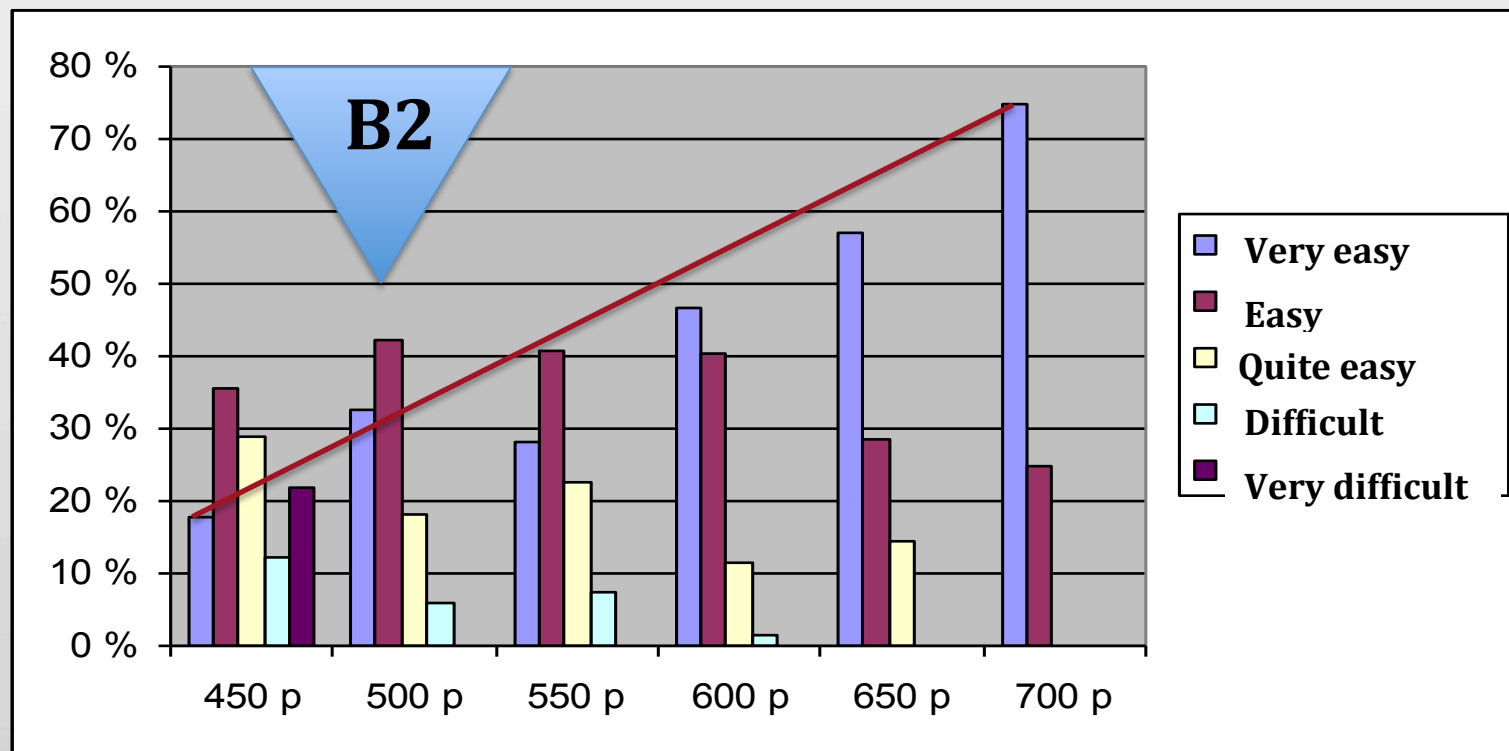
Questions about academic success

All questions combined into one factor

The Norwegian study: results

Score at university entrance-test & sub skills

Listening

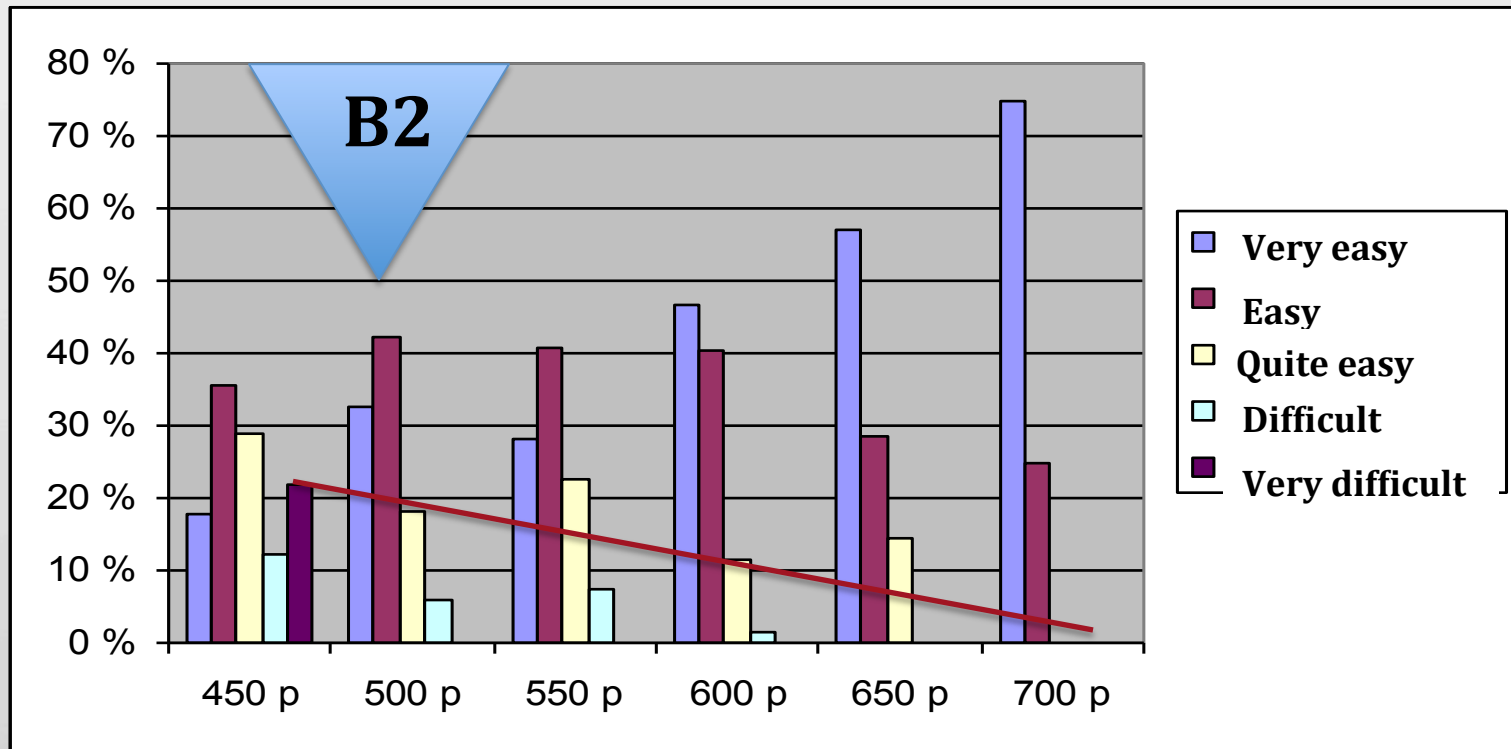


Gamma 0,264, $p < 0.05$ (0.00)

The Norwegian study: results

Score at university entrance-test & sub skills

Listening

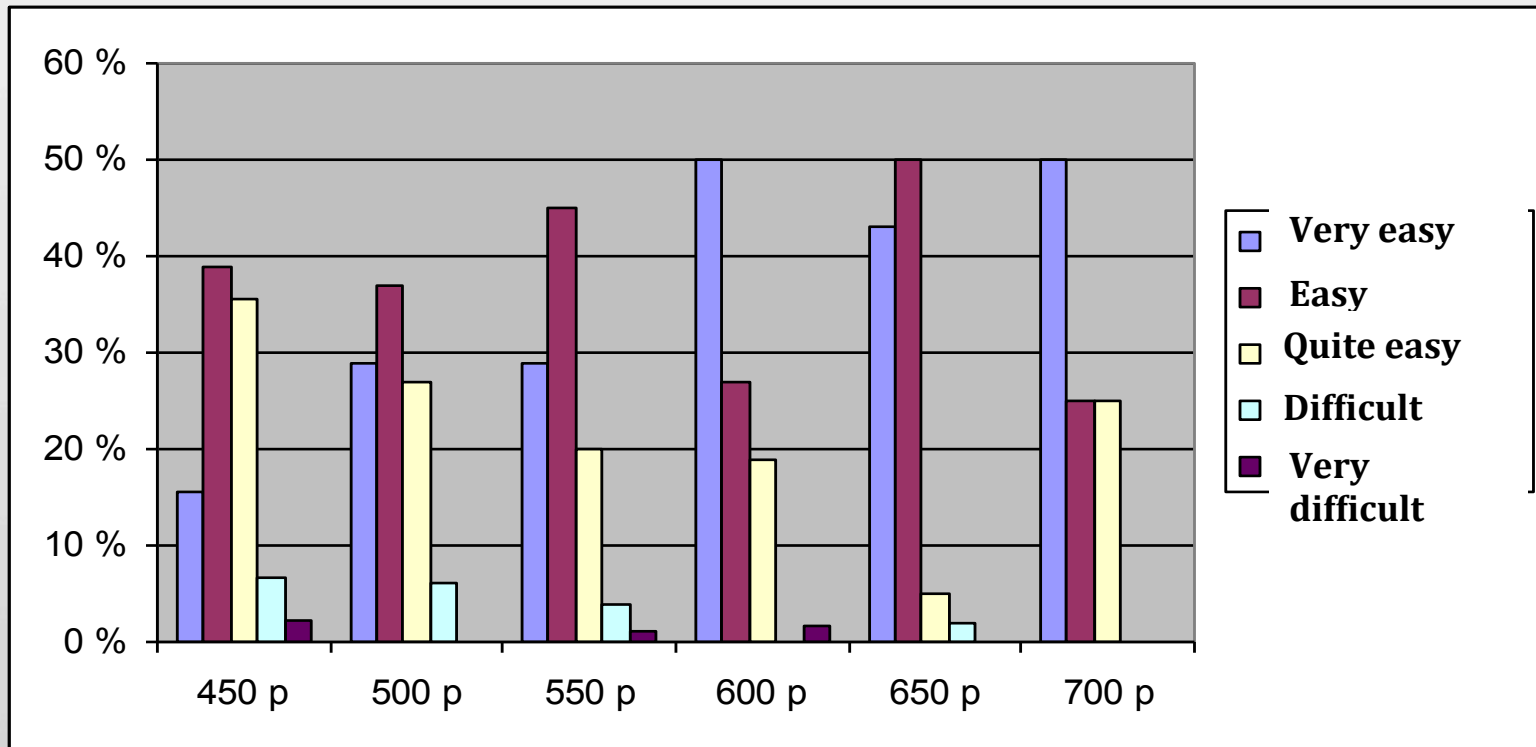


Gamma 0,264, $p < 0.05$ (0.00)

The Norwegian study: results

Score at university entrance-test & sub skills

Reading

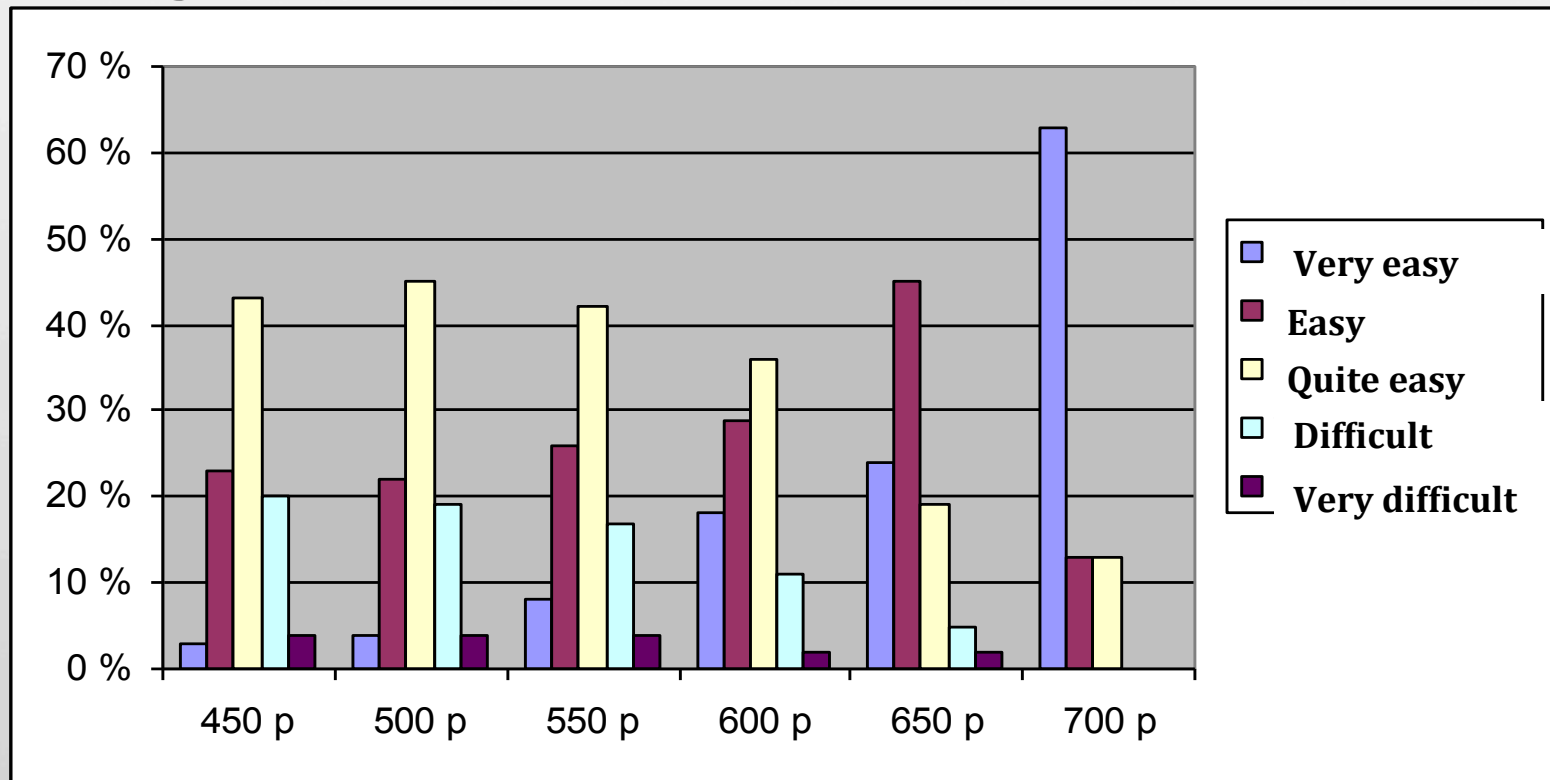


Gamma 0,307, $p < 0.05$ (0.00)

The Norwegian study: results

Score at university entrance-test & sub skills

Writing

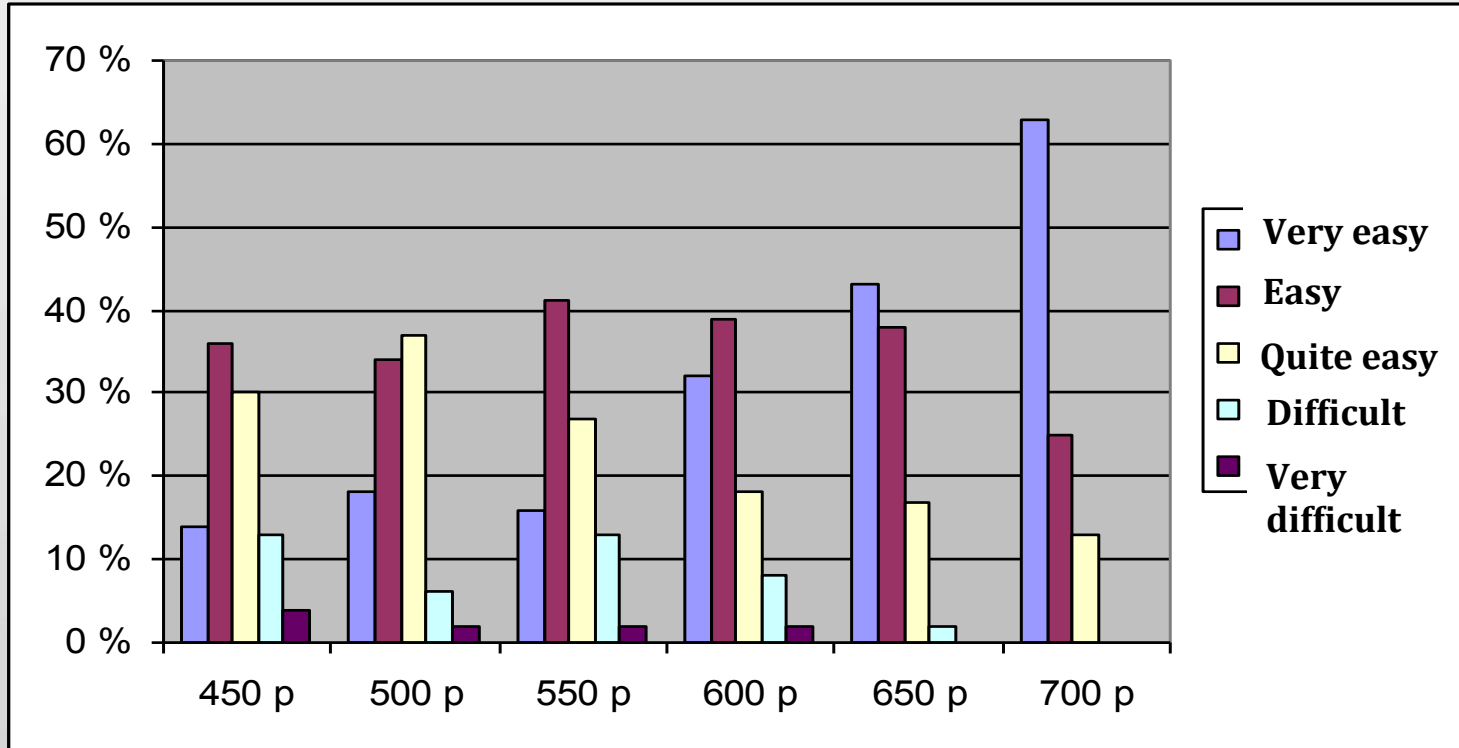


Gamma: 0,227, $p < 0.05$ (0.00)

The Norwegian study: results

Score at university entrance-test & sub skills

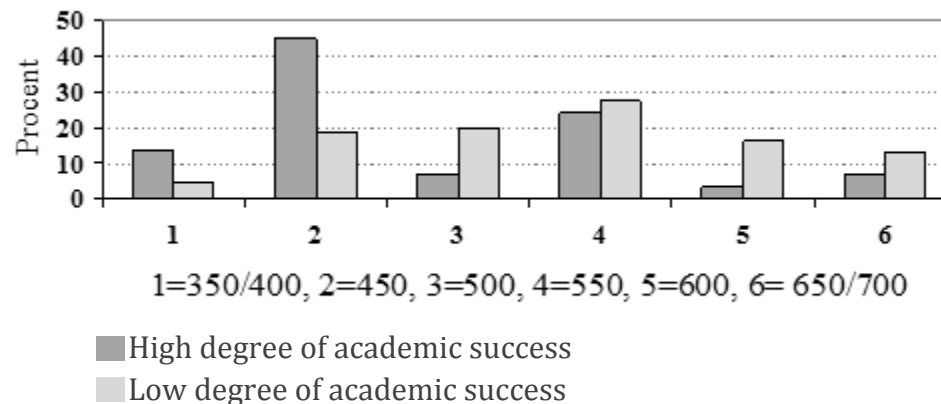
Speaking



Gamma 0,271, $p < 0.05$ (0.00)

The Norwegian study - results

Score at university entrance-test & academic success



The Norwegian study - results

Main findings

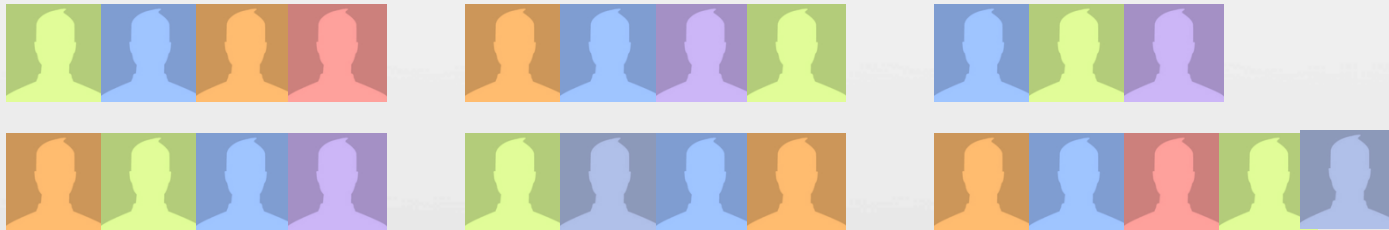
Scores at LAP-test correlate positively and significantly with academic success

B2 level is the minimum necessary to succeed

But is it enough?

The Belgian study

24 professors in 6 mixed focus groups (Jan & Feb 2014)



- Which skills are required on day 1?
- What proficiency level is expected on day 1?
- Methods:
 - Bookmarking
 - Individual judgment & group Consensus

(17 interviews with L2 students October – December 2012)

Central concept: day 1

What do we cognitively & linguistically expect of our students on day 1?

Should our expectations for L2 students differ?

No



Receptive skills rule

Reading

Listening

Writing

Speaking

“

First and foremost, students entering university should be able to store information

(Sociology)

This says a lot about our expectations. The active skills are below and the passive ones are on top.

(Geology)

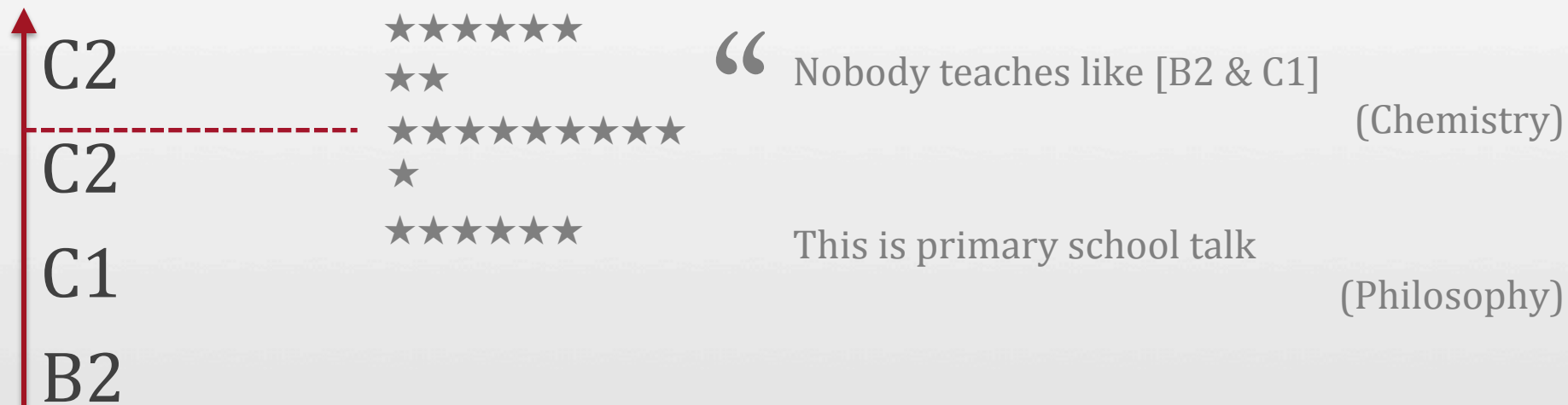
Expected reading on day 1



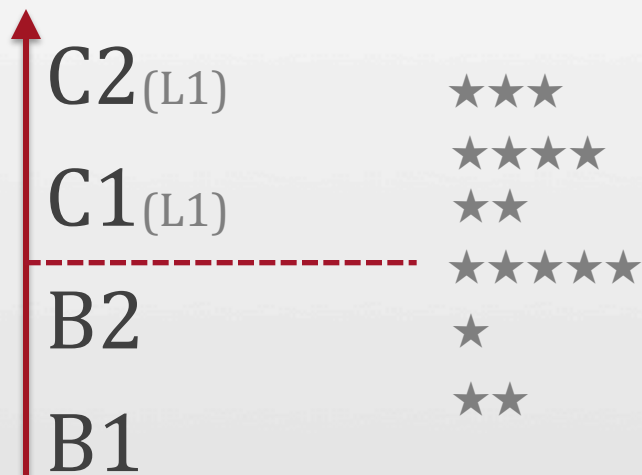
“ From day 1, students should be able to work with all these texts. It'll take them some effort, but it's doable.

(Educational affairs)

Expected listening on day 1



Expected writing on day 1



“ Psych: [B2 & B1 samples] are unacceptable, even if they are L2 students
Policy: But you still read this stuff in master students' papers?
Psych.: All the time! Even after 5 years at university

Expected speaking on day 1

Who cares about
speaking anyway?

- “
- Law: Basically, no faculty has any real demands when it comes to speaking
 - Eng.: True. Maybe we can lower the expected level then.
 - Law: It can be below [B2]
 - Eng.: Or maybe just slightly above?
 - Lang.: Do we need to test it at all?
 - Eng.: Yeah. You're right.

Subskills on day 1 (domain experts)

Must-have

- Take class notes
- Understand text structure
- Write accessibly / meaningfully

Mustn't-have

- Describe graphs & tables
- Give a presentation
- Summarize multiple sources
- Understand implicit message

About those subskills

First:

- It's all about structure
- Meaning > correctness

But:

- How about graphs & tables?
- How about presentations?

Main findings: B2

Is B2 appropriate as the threshold level for university entrance?

Norway: anything below B2 is insufficient

Belgium: for receptive skills B2 is insufficient
on day 1

=> Differentiated profiles

Main findings: Skills

What language skills should be part of a university entrance test?

Norway: Listening & writing cause most problems
 during study

Belgium: Receptive skills, structure, and getting
 meaning across matter most on day 1

=> Depends on focus

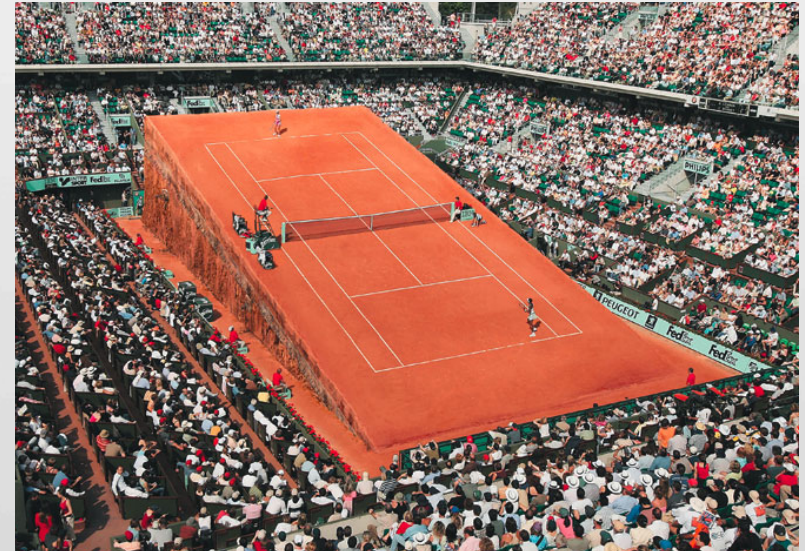
Main findings: Test focus

What is the appropriate context to focus on?

The importance of a level playing field



And of playing the same game



=> Fairness: is it fair for L2 university entrance tests to include skills we don't expect of L1s?

Thank you

cecilie.carlsen@vox.no

bart.deygers@arts.kuleuven.be