Assessing language for specific purposes — The role of background knowledge

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Assessing language for specific purposes — The role of background knowledge

1. The validity argument
2. Strategies
3. Conclusion
The validity argument
Validity of Language Tests

Validity

Strategies

Conclusion

Language Competence
Validity of Language Tests

- Future Performance
- Language Use

Language Competence
Validity of Language Tests

1. Test Competence
   1.1. Language Use
   1.2. Future Performance
   1.2.1. Test Score
   1.2.2. Test Performance
   1.2.3. Test

2. Strategies
3. Conclusion
Validity of Language Tests

Future Performance
Language Use

Test

Language Competence
Validity of Language Tests

Future Performance
Language Use

Interpretation

Test

Language Competence
Mechanical Engineering 1 (ME1)

Describe the design of the Kaplan turbine. Give examples of typical uses and give reasons for the selection of the Kaplan turbine.
Validity of Language Tests

Future Performance
Language Use

Test

Background Knowledge
Language Competence

Validity
Strategies
Conclusion
Validity of Language Tests

Future Performance
Language Use

Test

construct irrelevant variance

Background Knowledge
Language Competence
Validity of Specific Purpose Language Tests

Specific Purpose Language Use

Background Knowledge

Language Competence
Validity of **Specific Purpose** Language Tests

“Specific purpose language ability results from the interaction between specific purpose background knowledge and language ability.” (Douglas, 2000: 40)
Validity of Specific Purpose Language Tests

Specific Purpose Language Use

Specific Purpose Language Test

Specific Purpose Language Ability

Validity

Strategies

Conclusion
Validity of Specific Purpose Language Tests

A specific purpose language test is one in which test content and methods are derived from an analysis of a specific purpose target language use situation, so that test tasks and content are authentically representative of tasks in the target situation [...]. Such a test allows us to make inferences about a test taker's capacity to use language in the specific purpose domain (Douglas, 2000: 19).
Validity of **Specific Purpose** Language Tests

- **Specific Purpose Language Use**
- **Specific Purpose Language Test**
- **Specific Purpose Language Ability**

**Validity**

**Strategies**

**Conclusion**
Validity of **Specific Purpose** Language Tests

- Specific Purpose Language Use
- Specific Purpose Language Test
- Specific Purpose Language Ability
Validity of Specific Purpose Language Tests

background knowledge
• contaminates the validity argument
• is regarded as construct irrelevant variance

background knowledge
• is part of specific purpose language ability
• the validity of specific purpose language tests is limited to a specific language use domain
Strategies for writing task design in language for specific purposes tests
Language for specific purposes testing

- general language tests
- language for general academic purposes tests
- language for business purposes tests

background knowledge = contamination of construct = threat to validity
Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of having a car.
You should write at least 250 words.
Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.
Strategy: Avoid specificity

- avoiding subject specificity altogether
- minimise the role of background knowledge
- using general tests
- creating the atmosphere of specificity
Role of Background Knowledge
Role of Background Knowledge

IELTS

Validity
Strategies
Conclusion
Language for specific purposes testing

• law
• engineering
• aviation
Strategy: Avoid writing tasks

- reading tasks
- gap filling tasks
- listening tasks
Strategy: Provide subject specific input

- instructions
- prompts
- charts
- pictures
- texts
- video clips with subject specific information
Describe the design of the Kaplan turbine. Give examples of typical uses and give reasons for the selection of the Kaplan turbine.
Describe the design of the Kaplan turbine.

Give examples of typical uses and give reasons for the selection of the Kaplan turbine.
Mechanical Engineering 3 (ME3)

- Watch the video "Kaplan Turbine Working and Design".
- Describe the design of the Kaplan turbine.
- Give examples of typical uses and give reasons for the selection of the Kaplan Turbine.
Role of Background Knowledge

Validity
Strategies
Conclusion
Strategy: Control expected response

- Guided writing tasks
ILEC/Cambridge English: Legal (CL1)

Your law firm is planning a staff training seminar on the law relating to Mergers and Acquisitions. The partner in charge of the seminar has asked you to help him prepare the material for the seminar.

Write a memorandum to the partner. Your memorandum should:

- outline reasons why companies may want to merge
- consider the implications for employees
- explain the issues regarding supplier contracts
- mention relevant legislation in your country

Write your answer in 200-250 words in an appropriate style on the opposite page.
Role of Background Knowledge

ME3 ME2 CL1 ME1

Validity Strategies Conclusion
For the past six years your client, United Wheat Shippers, has signed annual agreements with the National Farmers' Association of Canada to purchase all the wheat planted each year by the Association's farmers at a fixed price.

Now the President of the National Farmers' Association, William LeFleur, has sent a letter to your client.

Read Mr LeFleur's letter, on which you have made some notes. Then using all the information in the notes, write a letter to Mr LeFleur on behalf of your client, United Wheat Shippers.
As you are aware, the price of wheat has suddenly doubled over the past month. This puts the Association in a very difficult position. Our contract with you states a fixed price, regardless of the market price of the wheat at harvest. However, when we signed this year’s contract, we could not foresee this extreme rise in the price of wheat.

We have always valued our business relationship over the years and that business relationship has been profitable on both sides. However, the current agreement will cause extreme financial difficulties for us and so we ask United Wheat Shippers to release us from this agreement and re-negotiate the deal based on current conditions.

Yours sincerely

William LeFleur

William LeFleur
President
National Farmers’ Association
Role of Background Knowledge

ME1
ME2
ME3

CL1
CL2

Validity
Strategies
Conclusion
Strategy: Use different registers

• "translations" into a more subject specific register
Read the letter below that a solicitor has written on behalf of a client. The letter is too informal in style and vocabulary. Rewrite the letter in a more appropriate way. Do not change the meaning or lose any of the information it contains.
Dear Richards & Morgan

We are working for Mr and Mrs Jacobson. They bought a house (19 Wilson Close, Hove, Brighton) 1 and a half years ago. Before they decided to buy it, they asked you examine the house and do an in-depth survey paper on it.

We think that we have a good case for a claim against you for bad work and we are going to sue you for this. You must send us the name and address of your insurers so that we can write to them as well.

Regards

Thomas Bedford
Dear Sirs

Mr and Mrs Jacobson – 19 Wilson Close, Hove, Brighton

We act on behalf of Mr and Mrs Jacobson who purchased the above property 18 months ago. Prior to the purchase our clients instructed your firm to inspect the property and provide a detailed survey report.

In our opinion our clients have a very strong case against your firm on the grounds that the survey report you provided to them was negligent. We have advised my clients to seek damages for professional negligence and legal proceedings will be issued in the near future. We ask that you kindly provide us with the name and address of your insurer as we will need to contact them in connection with this matter.

Yours faithfully

Thomas Bedford.
Strategies for task design in language for specific purposes tests

1. Avoid specificity
2. Avoid writing tasks
3. Provide subject specific input
4. Control expected response
5. Use different registers
Conclusion
Conclusion

• role of background knowledge

• strategies
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