Language Assessment for Multilingualism: Promoting linguistic diversity and intercultural communication

ASSESSING TEST-TAKERS' TRANSLANGUAGING COMPETENCE: THE CASE OF THE GREEK NATIONAL EXAMS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Dr Maria Stathopoulou
RCeL Research Associate
University of Athens
Starting with....

- Do foreign language tests assess learners’ ability to move back and forth between languages so as to communicate effectively?
- Do they assess their (multilingual) competence in switching between languages and relaying information from one language to another?
- Is there such a thing called ‘multilingual testing’?
Language testing internationally

- **Multilingual testing** is overlooked in the field of language testing and assessment.
- Language testing is still dominated by the *monolingual paradigm* (Shohamy, 2011).
- Assessment policies and testing practices are based upon *monolingual constructs* rather than being oriented towards assessing *multilingual competencies* (Dendrinos, 2012; Shohamy, 2011).
Language testing internationally

- The examinations of international systems are administered only in the target language, while the reality, worldview and ideology described and construed in them (cf. Balourdi, 2012) follow global patterns that do not take into consideration the relevant features of the local community.
National foreign language testing in Greece

- **National foreign language exams (KPG exams)**
  assess the knowledge of the candidates in 6 different languages
  - common specifications and descriptors based on the 6 level CEFR scale of language competence
  - the innovative use of Greek to assess specific competences (across languages)
The innovation in the KP exams

Mingling-of-languages idea

Monolingual testing ➔ Multilingual testing
Mediation in the Greek national foreign language exams (KPG exams)

Mediation tasks involve:

- extraction of information from a source text in one language and relaying it in another language for a given communicative purpose
- interpretation of meanings articulated in source texts & making of new meanings in the target language expressed appropriately for the context of situation (Dendrinos, 2006)
Mediation in the Greek national foreign language exams (KPG) : an example

THE TASK

Imagine you are part of a team preparing the WHAT’S ON guide for English-speaking visitors to your city. Below is the film section presenting in Greek the films which are now playing. Use the information in Greek to write a text in English (about 150 words) recommending one film for children and one for teenagers.
Mediation.. as translanguaging practice

- Involves interplay of languages
- Involves a 'hybrid practice of languaging‘ (Garcia, 2011)
- Translanguaging makes it clear that there are no clear-cut boundaries between the languages employed (Stathopoulou, 2013)

Translanguaging describes the use of literacy practices to “move back and forth with ease and comfort between and among different languages and dialects, different social classes, and different cultural and artistic forms” (Guerra, 2004: 8).
A glocal testing system & the introduction of mediation tasks

- Languages are not seen as separate systems in the mind of the language user: there are no clear-cut boundaries between them.
- Languages are treated **equally**
WHAT IS NOT ASSESSED:
Learners’ linguistic competence and language proficiency in one language

WHAT IS ASSESSED: Learners’
- ability to move back and forth between languages
- ability to simultaneously draw on different linguistic and cultural resources from a variety of contexts.
- multilingual competence by focusing on the user rather than the language as an abstract system (Dendrinos, 2011)
Researching mediation

- **Aim**: to investigate **what mediation is** by identifying successful mediation strategies in scripts produced by users of English when performing KPG written mediation tasks.

**STAGE 1**
- Task analysis (KPG Task Database)
- Typology of written mediation tasks

**STAGE 2**
- Textual analysis (Corpus of 53,000 words)
- Inventory of written mediation strategies (IWMS)


Read online: http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/kpg/gr_research_phd1.htm
Quantitative and qualitative analysis

- Quantitative analysis brought to the surface indications of differentiated strategy-use across tasks of different proficiency levels.
- Qualitative analysis showed to what extent the linguistic means, through which mediation strategies are realized, differs as the level increases.
Contribution & usefulness of the study

- The study constitutes a starting point for the development of **descriptors** and the creation of standardized measures and clear benchmarks for reliable assessment of mediation competence

- mediation strategies needed for learners of different levels when being involved in different mediation tasks

- the **language** to be used by learners at each proficiency level

(Stathopoulou, 2013a, 2013b)
Introduction of mediation tasks in a testing battery: the backwash effect...

Learners will make sense of the multilingual linguistic landscape they live in (Gorter, 2006)

- “linguistic homogenization through the spread of English (Hambye and Richards, 2012: 175) will be avoided
- linguistic diversity will be promoted
- polyphony will be appreciated
Finishing off ...

Multilingualism in the field of language testing?

What it means to know a language in today’s multilingual and multicultural societies?

How to assess multilingual competence?
Dr Maria Stathopoulou
mastathop@enl.uoa.gr

http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr

Work co-funded by the European Social Fund and the Greek National State – (NSRF), under the project of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens entitled “Differentiated and Graded National Foreign Language Exams”.