100

CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH

CENTENARY 1913–2013

Centenary Conference

CONFERENCE REPORT

CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH
Language Assessment
Part of the University of Cambridge

Centenary Conference
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In 2013 we marked the 100th anniversary of Cambridge English exams, an achievement celebrated throughout the year in events around the world. A particular highlight was the Centenary Conference, held in September in Cambridge, a city renowned for its academic tradition and home to Cambridge English Language Assessment.

Delegates attending the event enjoyed a day of presentations from leading exponents in topics as diverse as the teaching of English in China to the complexities of speech recognition software. It was a chance to catch up with old friends, make new contacts, and meet staff from all parts of Cambridge English Language Assessment, thereby strengthening the relationships which continue to underpin our success.

This document captures the essence of the Conference by providing a brief summary of the presentations and videos given on the day, and which can also be viewed in full on the Conference website. This is therefore only a brief record of what was a highly informative and reflective event, a chance to celebrate what we have achieved, to consider the direction we may travel in the future, and an opportunity to mark an outstanding achievement for Cambridge English Language Assessment.

WELCOME

" The Centenary Conference is an opportunity to celebrate the excellence, enterprise and energy demonstrated by Cambridge English Language Assessment throughout its 100-year history. From my perspective, as Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education within the University of Cambridge, it is also an opportunity to reflect on the wider contribution made by the organisation to the University's mission to support society, at home and internationally, through the provision of education and research at the highest levels of excellence. Cambridge English qualifications have touched millions of lives, and as a result Cambridge English Language Assessment has become an ambassador for the Cambridge 'brand'. For this, the University is forever in its debt, as are the many individuals around the world for whom a Cambridge English qualification has made an important contribution to their personal success.

John Rallison

" Delegates and speakers attending the Conference represent 45 different countries, and together – whether staff, teachers, administrators, academics or policy makers – boast a combined total of over 3,000 years' experience of working with Cambridge English Language Assessment. Bringing such depth of knowledge and experience together enables all of us at the Conference to focus on the 'big picture', the provision of language education for the 'real world', while also reflecting on key milestones in our organisation's growth from three candidates in 1913 to 4.5 million candidates today. Much has been said this year about our past achievements and future expansion, especially into areas such as bilingual education, and qualifications for different learner contexts; as a result, our Centenary Conference is an opportunity to look into the future, to consider areas of new growth, such as the school sector, and to examine the technological developments which will bring language learning to an even wider community. Cambridge English Language Assessment is well placed to respond to such challenges as it moves into its second century, and it is a pleasure and a privilege to share its vision with so many of those who have contributed to its success.

Mike Milanovic

John Rallison

Professor John Rallison (Chairman), is a Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Cambridge, and Chair of the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate – the University body responsible for the work of the Cambridge Assessment group including Cambridge English Language Assessment. Professor Rallison is Professor of Fluid Physics in the University's Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics, and is a former Director of the Newton Trust, which administers the Cambridge bursaries and also makes grants for research purposes within the University.

Mike Milanovic

Dr Michael Milanovic joined Cambridge in 1989, and in May 2003 he was appointed Chief Executive of Cambridge ESOL – now Cambridge English Language Assessment. He is in charge of a wide range of projects related to operational issues, the development of new examinations, procedures and research, and leading teams of experts in language learning, teaching and exam production. He is the Manager of the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) and co-Editor of *Studies in Language Testing (SiLT)*, published by Cambridge University Press. Dr Milanovic has been involved in language education and assessment since 1977 and has an MA in Applied Linguistics, along with a PhD in the same field focusing on performance-based assessment.

SESSION 1 – ASSESSING ENGLISH

Language learning is undertaken in a multi-level environment in which both top-level policy and classroom teaching co-exist, and in which future policy direction depends on an understanding of both quantitative and qualitative data. In this first session of the Conference, a new, systemic view of language assessment was presented, an approach which addresses current tensions and which has the potential to maximise existing interdisciplinary links.

A Systemic View of Assessment within an Educational Context

Dr Nick Saville and Dr Neil Jones

With 'learning' identified as the unifying factor in all educational contexts, Dr Nick Saville presented the case for a new systemic assessment model, devised by Cambridge English Language Assessment, based on the concept of Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA). This model aims to address the sometimes disconnected but always dynamic relationship between the macro and micro-levels in language policy design and delivery.

For Saville, the macro-level encompasses the framing of educational goals and the evaluation of educational outcomes, with individual learning interactions taking place at the micro-level. At the macro-level, many socio-political, socio-cultural and political factors come into play, including issues of multilingualism, and the frequent 'nesting' of national, regional and local policies which can add further layers of complexity. When developing policy, however, the needs of society and 'real-life experience' must be paramount, and also expressed through policy components ranging from curriculum design to certification, components which must also reflect micro-level drivers, such as classroom context or cohort diversity.

LOA aims to link the macro, policy-driven level with the realities of the micro-level, in a process embodied in classroom teaching, internal testing and external examinations. Saville explained that, for Cambridge English Language Assessment, this means the provision of different English assessments for different educational needs, more national and institutional-level projects, and more research into educational impacts within specific contexts. By using assessments already linked to the CEFR, this also allows the concept of learning ladders to underpin policy development and reform, further strengthening the links between policy and society's wider needs.

Dr Neil Jones then examined LOA in more detail, immediately acknowledging the fact that the learning/assessment relationship is constantly changing in response to a number of forces. For example, as current cognitive and educational theory casts doubt upon the validity of standard testing, traditional external, summative exams are being reassessed. The increased use of technology is influencing the delivery of learning and testing, with the growing commoditisation of both

increasingly evident. There are also ideological drivers, such as the repurposing of tests to provide accountability and the subsequent linking of test results to targets and sanctions.

For Jones, LOA articulates the drivers influencing Cambridge English Language Assessment's approach to learning and assessment: that English is learned for the purpose of communication; that the CEFR, and the Can Do approach, provide explicit constructs for language ability; and that a strong approach to measurement, and a constant striving for positive impact, are essential.

Historically, Cambridge English qualifications have always been closely mapped against the language levels defined by the Council of Europe prior to the CEFR's development. This mapping was based on the socio-cognitive model of language learning, now referenced by the CEFR, in which the language learner, when responding to a specific task or language activity, draws on processes, strategies and knowledge. To deliver effective measurement, graded items from an item bank are used to create tests linked to specific levels, thereby allowing the ranking of candidates according to CEFR standards, a process which becomes easier over time as more data is generated. Jones also stressed the importance of qualitative assessment in this context, an issue which Cambridge English Language Assessment aims to support with initiatives such as skills profiles, which help clarify the skills of individual learners within the same levels.

Above all, stated Jones, any assessment must have a positive impact, and must encourage 'impact by design' – a feedback loop to enable the modification of classroom practice in order to sustain positive impact. LOA provides a theory of action which allows such modification to take place by placing tasks clearly linked to 'real-world' experience at the centre of the learning and assessment process. As a result, the learner's engagement with the task has 'interactional authenticity', and their performance can be linked to real-world equivalents. An LOA-driven syllabus would therefore link tasks to LOA activities which would, in turn, be driven by high-level, CEFR-linked learning objectives. Tasks would first be assessed in the classroom, with feedback used to modify learning objectives, before eventually being externally examined, with performance leading to a record of achievement linked to the CEFR.

Technology will greatly support such an approach, as it can be used to adapt and present tasks, mediate interactions and capture outcomes (especially transient outcomes), and also capture the data required for a quantitative analysis, although Jones stressed the importance of effective data management strategies to prevent too much data becoming a burden on teaching staff. As a result, LOA has the potential to empower students, enable reflection, and further encourage student autonomy – a trend already emerging as technology enables greater independence among language learners worldwide.

Nick Saville

Nick Saville's research interests include: the development and validation of tasks and rating scales for Speaking tests; the development of models for investigating test impact; the implementation of quality management systems (QMS) in test development and validation; and the uses of language assessment for migration and citizenship purposes.

Nick is Cambridge English Language Assessment's representative to the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) and is closely involved with the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and English Profile. He has published widely and is an Associate Editor of *Language Assessment Quarterly*.

Before joining Cambridge ESOL in 1989, Nick worked at the University of Cagliari (Italy) and managed a test development project in Tokyo. He holds a PhD in Language Test Impact from the University of Bedfordshire, and degrees in Linguistics and in TEFL from the University of Reading.

Neil Jones

Neil Jones holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Edinburgh on applying item response theory. After teaching English in countries including Poland and Japan, where he set up programmes at university level, Neil came to Cambridge in 1992. He has worked on innovative developments including item-banking and computer-adaptive testing, and on the construction and use of multilingual proficiency frameworks, including the Common European Framework of Reference. He directed research for Asset Languages, developed for the UK government's national languages strategy, and most recently directed the first European Survey on Language Competences, co-ordinated by Cambridge English Language Assessment for the European Commission. His current interest is Learning Oriented Assessment.

SESSION 2 – LEARNING ENGLISH

The learning of English within the classroom is undergoing dramatic change. Governments around the world are developing language-learning policies in response to rapidly evolving socio-political contexts, looking to improve the quality and extent of language learning within fixed educational constraints and with limited resources, issues which our three speakers explored.

Profiling English in China: The Impact of Socio-Economic Context on Learning English

Dr David Graddol

Dr David Graddol drew on his recently published book *Profiling English in China: The Pearl River Delta*, which explored the changing role and status of the English language in an area of Guangdong Province in South China stretching from Hong Kong and Macau to the city of Guangzhou. This area has undergone unprecedented socio-economic transformation in the last 30 years, giving rise to a complex picture of language learning and language need. Across the region, English at CEFR Level C1 is increasingly required by those aspiring to higher value occupations, or who want to study or work overseas, while basic English at Level A2 is also valued within the hospitality and leisure sectors. The lack of demand for skills at Level B2 therefore poses a problem for the region's education system. Evidence also shows that Hong Kong students, previously thought to have superior English language skills, are now performing less well than their peers in Mainland China, who also have the advantage (from an employer's perspective) of an understanding of Chinese business.

There is therefore an undoubted 'identity crisis' emerging among Hong Kong citizens who feel socially, politically and linguistically 'swamped' by Mainland China. As a result, Graddol argued that future language policy must acknowledge the existing and complex language landscape now evolving within the Pearl River Delta, and strongly suggested that English language experts work with

local Chinese researchers to provide a more nuanced understanding of the role played by English in a society which is experiencing such rapid change.

David Graddol

David Graddol is well known as a writer, lecturer and policy consultant on issues related to global English and educational trends. David is Director of The English Company (UK) and was until 2013 joint Editor of the Cambridge University Press journal *English Today*. He is on the Editorial Boards of several other journals, including *Language Problems and Language Planning*, and *Visual Communication*.

David's publications include several important research and policy documents commissioned by the British Council. *The Future of English?* (1997) set out a new agenda for understanding the growing importance of English as an international language and its role in globalisation. *English Next* (2006), provided an update on English in global education and this was followed by *English Next India* (2010), which explores the changing status of English in India and its role in India's economic development. He is currently working on *English Next Brazil*, which will be published in March 2014, and a book for Cambridge English, *Profiling English in China: The Pearl River Delta* is now in press.

David previously worked for 25 years in the Faculty of Education and Language Studies at the UK Open University and has also been a Visiting Associate Professor at City University of Hong Kong (British Council Distinguished Visiting Scholar). He has worked as a consultant on various ELT projects in China, India and Latin America since the early 1990s.

Learning English as a Basic Skill: Is Younger Necessarily Better?

Melanie Williams

The drive towards ever-younger English language learners was challenged by Melanie Williams in a review of current practice that considered rationale, context and learner age. First asking 'why' English was taught to progressively younger students, Williams acknowledged primary students' ability to learn 'holistically', their greater motivation, and their physical ability to articulate different sounds, as advantages in language acquisition. However, Williams also noted significant differences in primary student age, group size, teaching hours per week, and methodological emphasis; related teacher training could be optional, compulsory, or sometimes non-existent; and the quality of monitoring was also variable, with policy makers commonly using broad objectives which were poorly linked to stakeholder needs.

Based on these observations, Williams argued that the most successful young learner programmes were tailored to local needs, involved all stakeholders (from students to universities), and were driven by clear and transparent objectives. The decision to introduce English at primary level must also be driven primarily by pedagogy, not politics, and supported by long-term impact studies, including 'top down/bottom up' analyses. These should be used to inform future programme development, determine the best teaching approach, and define ideal teaching support. Educators must also continually observe, evaluate and modify young English learner programmes and realistically assess their value, asking whether the funds required by such programmes may be better used to support English learning in secondary school.

Melanie Williams

Melanie Williams writes teachers' materials and coursebooks for young learners. She works closely with Cambridge English Language Assessment on their teachers' awards: YL Extension to *CELTA*, *ICELT*. Recent publications include *The TKT Course* and teachers' books for *Kid's Box* (Cambridge). She is Series Editor of *Penguin Kids* (Pearson).

Integrating Content and English Language Learning in Schools: L1, B2, 3Ps?

Kay Bentley

Given the 'unstoppable' rise of CLIL – content and language integrated learning – in classrooms worldwide, Kay Bentley considered current concerns regarding the language levels expected of CLIL teachers. As CLIL demands significant language and subject knowledge, CEFR Level C1 is increasingly becoming a minimum requirement for CLIL teachers in Europe. However, as demand can often outstrip supply, Level B2 and sometimes Level B1 is not uncommon among CLIL teachers, despite the fact that B2 is considered less than sufficient (according to the CEFR) for social, academic or professional purposes. Bentley asked whether it was therefore fair on learners to expect teachers with lower than C1 levels to teach in a CLIL context.

Bentley then considered planned use of L1 in both primary and secondary CLIL classrooms to demonstrate that it is not only teachers with levels of B2 or below who code switch. For example, if L1 is used as a code-switching strategy in order to activate students' prior knowledge of content, this can highlight linguistic similarities and differences in subject-specific lexis and thereby lead to a richer linguistic experience. The reality is that many teachers with C1 and C2 levels accept code switching when students collaborate to problem-solve, or to prepare presentations. Bentley also suggested that CLIL lessons tend to encourage production of subject content at the start, then include practice of new subject content through communicative tasks, and end with students presenting findings, results or sharing information. The traditional '3Ps' (presentation, practice and production) of ELT lessons are therefore inverted.

Bentley argued that the priority must be to help teachers with B2 levels to reach C1, and as part of this she suggested the development of more content-specific Cambridge English professional qualifications to provide, for example, a science, maths or humanities equivalent to BEC (*Cambridge English: Business Certificates*).

Kay Bentley

Since 1997 Kay Bentley has taught learners and teachers in CLIL programmes. She authored CLIL books for Cambridge University Press in addition to an online CLIL course for Cambridge English Teacher. She has written sections of an Egyptian bilingual primary curriculum and a Kazakh trilingual secondary curriculum for Cambridge English.

SESSION 3 – TEACHING ENGLISH

In many countries, the approach to the teaching of English has undergone a dramatic transformation. Governments increasingly appreciate the important benefits that English skills can deliver to their economies and to their citizens, but have to balance the need for English tuition against other curriculum demands and budget constraints, while also addressing issues of accessibility and a shortage of skilled English teachers. In this session, two speakers looked at these issues from different perspectives and drew some interesting conclusions.

The Native/Non-Native Conundrum Revisited

Professor Péter Medgyes

Professor Péter Medgyes is the author of a well-known paper in which he challenged the perceived superiority of native-speaking English language teachers over non-native speakers. Using the term 'NEST' (Native English Speaker) and 'non-NEST', the paper questioned the assumption that the discrepancy in language proficiency between NESTs and Non-NESTs accounted for discrepancies in teacher behaviours, citing research which suggested that the opposite was true, and that Non-NESTs could in fact provide a better learner model, and would deliver language-learning strategies more effectively. He also suggested that as non-NESTs often knew more about the English language, they were better placed both to anticipate their students' language difficulties and to empathise with their needs. In addition, English language learning could improve when non-NESTs and students shared a mother tongue.

This paper opened a 'large can of worms', commented Medgyes, attracting significant criticism but also highlighting issues such as discriminatory employment practices based on perceptions that non-NEST status equalled a 'deficit'. There was also a concern that NESTs' unrivalled confidence in the 'right' way of language teaching resulted in the predominance of NEST teaching methods, even if these ran counter to local education policies.

Times, however, have changed. Non-NEST teachers now outnumber NESTs at a ratio of 4:1, and given this disparity – and growing demand – Medgyes asked if NESTs could still be considered 'custodians' of the English language, or whether non-NESTs now have equal 'ownership'. Medgyes also asked if NESTs were now part of the problem, rather than the solution, as the 'cultural baggage' they bring to teaching is no longer relevant to the international context in which English is used.

He therefore asked for greater support for non-NEST teachers, and proposed a 12-point action plan as a possible way forward. The plan's suggestions include the development of a comprehensive corpora of 'English as a Lingua Franca', and the creation of CLIL-specific teacher training frameworks. Such initiatives could be used alongside a rigorous reappraisal of the role of NESTs which, for example, could lead to the requirement that any NEST teacher should be prepared to stay for an extended period in the country in which they are employed.

Péter Medgyes

Péter Medgyes CBE, is Professor of Applied Linguistics and Language Pedagogy at the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest. He is the author of numerous books and articles, including *The Non-Native Teacher* (Macmillan 1994, winner of the Duke of Edinburgh Book Competition) and *Laughing Matters* (Cambridge University Press 2002).

Teaching English in Mexico, a Matter of Public Policy

Dr Juan Manuel Martínez García

Presenting a case study of national language teaching policy development, Dr Juan Manuel Martínez García began with a summary of the issues that had prompted the development of Mexico's NEPBE programme – National English Program in Basic Education. These issues included the teaching of English from the perspective of Spanish, the combined negative effect on teacher selection of the lack of teacher profiles and undue union influence, and poorly established guidelines for continuing education. These and other factors had prevented any significant improvement in Mexico's English language teaching since it was first introduced into the curriculum in 1925. In addition, student progress was further hampered by the country's proximity to the United States and therefore by the widespread use of Spanish on both sides of the border, even though it is not the indigenous language of many students.

It was clear that Mexico's language policy had to change, both for the benefit of the individual and the nation. Dr García cited statistics showing that seven out of 10 scholarships to study abroad are not taken up as graduates fail to obtain the necessary English test scores. Economically, English is perceived as an agent of personal mobility and financial improvement, but also a skill set which attracts foreign investment.

To address these issues, the NEPBE programme was launched using a pedagogical approach based on progress through a series of levels which are aligned with the CEFR, and which use Cambridge English examinations as assessment tools. Teachers on the programme are also required to demonstrate English skills at least one or two levels above the level being taught.

Over 24,800 schools now participate in the NEPBE programme, with around 6.7 million students being taught by 37,504 teachers, and the programme is having significant positive impact. English has acquired value as 'linguistic capital', with the benefits it can bring the Mexican service sector alone estimated to be worth around $27 billion per annum. English skills are perceived to be of benefit to Mexican society and to its economy thereby increasing the country's integration into a globalised world. As a result, increased political will within Mexico continues to drive the programme forward, supported by the growing use of technology, qualitative reviews of curricula achieved through evaluation and follow-up, and by the use of impact by design studies in order to help Mexico develop specific models for future intervention.

Juan Manuel Martínez García

Juan has a doctorate degree in Applied Statistics, from Kyushu Imperial University in Fukuoka, Japan and in Educational Research from the Autonomous University of Coahuila, Mexico.

He is currently the Planning Director of Curricular Development for the Vice Ministry of Basic Education and the Coordinator of the National English Program in Basic Education.

SESSION 4 – TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE

As many speakers throughout the Conference noted, technology is playing a transformative role in the development of English language teaching, learning and assessment, and new developments on the horizon – and beyond – will change the landscape even further. In this session, our speakers examined the role of technology from both pedagogical and research perspectives, asking how technology could meet the demands of future generations of language learners.

The Future Directions of Technology-Supported Language Learning

Michael Carrier

Digital learning, stated Michael Carrier, exemplifies the generational shift towards greater reliance on technology, and has resulted in more democratic access to language learning which in turn has enabled policy makers to move swiftly towards social and economic goals. Technology brings access to high-quality English language learning tools, while also maximising learning time, and is increasingly becoming 'invisible' within language education systems.

But digital learning does require a new pedagogical approach. Teachers need to manage multiple digital learning channels, both in and out of class, with the drive towards BYOD (bring your own device) indicating a future in which device convergence will effect further change. One example – the flipped classroom – is already becoming familiar, where the learning takes place at home and homework in the classroom.

For Carrier, learner and device are at the centre of digital learning, supported by technologies such as Cloud computing which allow constant resource synchronisation, and constant monitoring. Future 'hand-held' learning will lead to greater time spent studying both individually and collaboratively, breaking down the 'barrier' represented by the classroom and enabling greater personalisation of content. Remote, virtual tuition will become more common, and content will be increasingly driven by 'big data' – huge, continuously generated data sets resulting from increased technology use.

Looking further ahead, innovations such as wearable devices or improved translation technology will present further challenges for teachers and assessors. As a result, language assessors and teaching professionals must remain aware of technology if students are to continue to make the most of the opportunities it can deliver.

Michael Carrier

Michael Carrier is Director of Strategic Partnerships for Cambridge English Language Assessment.

He has worked in language education for 30 years as a teacher, trainer, author and director in Germany, Italy, Poland, the UK and USA, and lectured worldwide.

He was formerly Executive Director of Eurocentres USA, CEO of the International House World network and Director, English Language Innovation at the British Council in London.

He has written many ELT coursebooks and articles and is currently Editor of the Technology section of *Modern English Teacher*.

He is currently serving on the Boards of EAQUALS, the TIRF research foundation in the US and ICC – the European Language Network, and is also on the Advisory Board of the *Cambridge University Press Language Teaching* journal.

He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, a Member of the Institute of Directors, the Society of Authors and the Oxford & Cambridge Club.

Insights from Computational Linguistics in Teaching and Assessing Written English

Professor Ted Briscoe

Growth in English language tuition is leading to greater use of technology in both the classroom and in assessment in order to support more testing and faster results. Professor Ted Briscoe focused on one aspect of this technological revolution, the automatic assessment of free text.

Successful automation offers significant advantages, such as immediate feedback and the application of consistent assessment criteria, in applications ranging from self-assessment to the second marking of high-stakes exams. However, automation must also maintain a high correlation with human examiner performance, and must be able to deliver pedagogically useful feedback.

Machine-grading requires the identification of specific textual features, with scores representing weighted combinations of such features. Existing and accumulated data improves this identification process and allows inferences to be made about unannotated data. Analyses show that machine-grading correlates closely with human assessor performance (as humans can, after all, also make errors), but there are always concerns regarding the risk of generalisation and therefore error. For Briscoe and his team, the use of the Cambridge English Corpus as an underlying database provides one solution, with test analyses showing up to 90% identification of incorrect word sequences. Use of the Corpus also improves feedback word by word, and phrase by phrase, thereby delivering sentence-level grading.

Briscoe's assessment system is now being trialled, and while initial user feedback is very positive, areas which need further development have also been identified, such as improved grading at script, sentence and word levels, and the intuitive and easily interpretable presentation of results.

Ted Briscoe

Ted Briscoe has been a member of staff at the Computer Laboratory, University of Cambridge since 1989, a Reader since 2000 and Professor since 2004. His broad research interests are in computational and theoretical linguistics, and automated speech and language processing. He

directed and taught on the MPhil in Computer Speech, Text and Internet Technology, taught jointly with the Engineering Department, now a theme within the MPhil in Advanced Computer Science run by the Computer Laboratory.

From 1990 until 1996 he was an EPSRC Advanced Research Fellow undertaking research at Macquarie University in Sydney, the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and the Xerox European Research Centre in Grenoble, as well as at the Computer Laboratory.

His specific research interests include (nearly-)deterministic, statistical and robust parsing techniques, acquiring lexical information from electronic textual corpora and dictionaries, applications of parsing to text classification and information extraction, models of human language learning and parsing, and evolutionary simulations of language variation and change.

He has published over 100 research articles, edited three books, and been Principal/Co-Investigator or Coordinator of 15 EU and UK- funded projects since 1985. He is joint Editor of *Computer Speech and Language*, and from October 2013 will be the Inaugural Director of the ALTA Institute for research into automated language teaching and assessment in collaboration with Cambridge English Language Assessment. In 2004 he cofounded iLexIR Ltd to facilitate commercial exploitation of advances in natural language processing.

Automatic Assessment of Spoken English: Challenges and Opportunities for Speech Technology

Professor Mark Gales

Shifting focus to the automatic assessment of speaking performance, Professor Mark Gales first considered the richness of spoken language, which encompasses aspects such as phrasing, prosody, speaker characteristics and environment. Assessments must also judge coherency, pronunciation and appropriateness of message and context.

Such challenges could be addressed by incorporating speech recognition technology into audio assessment. Such technology already features in devices such as smart phones or tablets, but performance is erratic as it relies on insufficient acoustic and language data, especially for non-native speakers. This last requirement is particularly important for speaking assessment, but also raises questions as to whether L1 represents a 'gold standard' for speaking performance.

Variable recording environments can further compromise speech recognition systems, as can the limited availability of language and acoustic model training data (useful in the transcription of disfluencies). The testing structures used, primarily short questions or story retelling, may reduce recognition errors but also limit spontaneity and the assessment of message construction.

One way forward could be an assessment model which aligns speech recognition with textual analysis, as this can highlight features such as grammar, vocabulary and fluency. But key challenges remain, including the accurate assessment of open question, discussion or argument construction. Gales therefore suggested that current technology limits the immediate application of speech recognition systems, but also referenced research on possible future solutions such as 'Intelligent Interactive Agents for Assessment' – systems combining a number of different speech recognition

systems, including spoken dialogue systems and expressive speech synthesis, in order to improve the quality of assessment.

Mark Gales

Mark Gales studied for the BA in Electrical and Information Sciences at the University of Cambridge from 1985–88. Following graduation he worked as a consultant at Roke Manor Research Ltd. In 1995 he completed his doctoral thesis and was then elected a Research Fellow at Emmanuel College Cambridge. He joined the Speech Group at the IBM T.J. Watson Research Center in 1997 as a Research Staff Member. In 1999 he returned to Cambridge University as a University Lecturer. He is currently a Professor of Information Engineering and a Fellow of Emmanuel College. He has authored and co-authored over 200 papers in the Speech Processing Area. Gales is a Fellow of the IEEE and was a member of the Speech Technical Committee from 2001–2004. He is currently an Associate Editor for IEEE Transactions on *Audio Speech and Language Processing* and on the Editorial Board of *Computer Speech and Language*.

SESSION 5 – USING ENGLISH

For Cambridge English Language Assessment, English teaching must be linked to 'real-life' application – so that students gain skills which are of real value, whether to improve their CV, help them move to another country to work or study, or to progress in their profession. In this session, we considered the use of English in different contexts, and looked at the challenges such contexts present.

Using English at Work: Learning and Using English on the Job

Dr Kathleen M Bailey

Dr Kathleen Bailey began by describing her work with TIRF – The International Research Foundation for English Language Education – which supports research into the use of English in the emerging knowledge economy. Bailey drew on TIRF research undertaken in 2004–6, which examined a particular issue of continued economic relevance, namely the need to improve the English language skills of the many migrants who move to the US to take up manufacturing jobs. These migrants come from across the world to meet the growing demand for unskilled workers, but once employed their poor English skills prove a barrier to workplace communication, and can compromise safety and efficiency if they are unable to comprehend training or instruction.

A common employer response to this issue is to encourage workers to develop their English skills in their own time, and at their own expense. In her talk, Bailey focused on an alternative strategy adopted by door and window company Woodfold-Marco Manufacturing, which chose instead to partner with local learning institution Portland Community College to provide training on site and 'on the clock' (therefore free to those taking part). The research showed that the benefits this approach delivered were 'substantial'; employees enjoyed increased job security and advancement,

and became more involved in the success of the organisation. The partnership was so successful that three years later, 60 firms were working with the College to implement the same ESL strategy.

Bailey noted that online English language learning could represent greater opportunities for on-site learning, and invited delegates to visit the TIRF website (www.tirfonline.org). There you will find freely available research papers that provide more information on ESL strategies within the workforce context.

Kathleen Bailey

Kathleen Bailey completed her MA in TESL and her PhD in Applied Linguistics at UCLA. She is currently a Professor at the Monterey Institute of International Studies (MIIS). She was TESOL President from 1998-99 and currently serves as the President of TIRF (The International Research Foundation for English Language Education).

Using English for Professional Purposes

Professor Tim McNamara

English proficiency is highly valued in the healthcare sector, especially in the UK and Australia where international medical graduates represent up to 40% of doctors. Migrant healthcare professionals are typically screened using both general and profession-specific tests, such as *IELTS* and Australia's Occupational English Test (OET); the challenge for policy makers, explained Professor Tim McNamara, is to ensure that these specific-purposes tests always 'get it right' given that poor English skills can have life-threatening consequences.

McNamara recently completed a three-year study on the OET which asked whether the linguistic selection criteria used delivered a sufficiently accurate assessment. In the OET, although profession-specific and general healthcare-related tasks are employed to test all four language skills, assessment is based on linguistic criteria determined by language professionals. The research shows a distinct difference between the linguistic ability demanded by the test and the 'real-life' language skills required by a healthcare professional, with the resulting risk that someone could pass the test yet still fail to communicate effectively in the workplace.

In response, McNamara suggested two new test criteria – clinical engagement and discourse management – based on specific linguistic demands. Research into the indigenous criteria required for judging written clinical communication is also underway, alongside an investigation into inter- and intra-professional communication disparities, and the use of English as a lingua franca in healthcare environments.

Overall, however, McNamara considered specific-purposes testing to offer many advantages, and even though it was more resource intensive, the high-stakes contexts in which it was used justify the expense required.

Tim McNamara

Tim McNamara is Professor in the School of Languages and Linguistics at The University of Melbourne. His main areas of research are in language testing (particularly specific-purposes language testing, Rasch measurement, and the social and political functions of language tests), and in poststructuralist perspectives on language. Tim was closely involved with the establishment of the Language Testing Research Centre at Melbourne, now in its 24th year. The Occupational English Test, which he developed and validated, is used internationally as a clinical communication screening test for migrant health professionals. His publications include *Measuring Second Language Performance* (Longman 1996), *Language Testing* (OUP 2000) and (with Carsten Roever) *Language Testing: The Social Dimension* (Blackwell 2006). He is currently preparing a manuscript for publication entitled *Language and Subjectivity*. Tim was part of the original team that developed *IELTS*, and also worked on the development of the TOEFL-iBT Speaking sub-test.
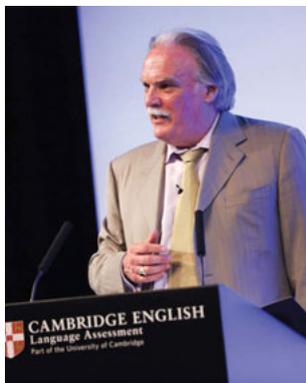
The Multilingual City

Dr Lid King

In this final session, Dr Lid King focused on the LUCIDE project (Languages in Urban Communities – Integration and Diversity for Europe), a network which is developing ideas on how to manage multilingual citizen communities. Such initiatives are a response to the rise of the multilingual city, resulting in part from the unprecedented mobility English skills have delivered.

For King, the multilingual city is the future – more autonomous, less constrained by national policy, and a focus for multiculturalism. To support such cities, policy makers have to consider aspects such as education, public interaction (especially the encouragement of democratic engagement), and the urban space. City-specific language policies will be needed, driven by community needs and commercial pressures, and embodied in local and institutional initiatives created to drive bottom-up change designed to address specific sector needs.

This may be a vision of the future, said King, but it is already a reality for many cities such as London where both 'white British' residents, and those who say they speak English 'very well', are now in the minority. But despite such trends, English will remain an omnipresent feature of the multilingual environment; it could even become the 'glue' that holds such cities together, and as a result support for English skills should perhaps be an even greater priority (even though, as King noted, in many cities, including London, English itself was evolving into a 'new language'). In summary, King asked delegates to prepare for a linguistic future featuring more not less diversity, one which will present political and educational challenges but also a greater need for English language skills.

Lid King

Lid King has extensive experience of languages teaching, materials development and examining at secondary level, and in Adult and Higher Education. As Director of CILT (1992–2003) he played a major part in expanding the work of the organisation, spearheading a range of national and European projects, including the establishment of the Comenius regional language network and the initiation

of support for Primary Languages. He also helped establish the Languages National Training Organisation.

Between September 2003 and April 2011 Lid was National Director for Languages with responsibility for the implementation of the Languages Strategy. He worked with Lord Dearing on the Languages Review, of which he is co-author. He has extensive experience of languages both in the UK and Europe, and has advised the European Commission, Council of Europe and national governments as well as leading major European Projects (Lingu@net, LUCIDE). Since 2011 he has continued to work in support of a strategic approach to languages in England and Europe through The Languages Company, which he established in 2008.

VIDEO CLIPS

The Conference sessions included short video presentations by speakers from Spain, Italy, the UK and China.

SESSION 2 – LEARNING ENGLISH

VIDEO: CLIL IN MADRID – TWO CASE STUDIES

Nigel Pike, Director of Assessment, showcased two innovative and very positive CLIL projects from the Spanish state and private education sectors. Mercedes Marin, Deputy Director of Innovation Programmes for the Comunidad de Madrid, described the CLIL approach adopted by a growing number of state primary and secondary schools, where one-third of subject teaching is in English, delivered by teachers with at least Level C1 ability; this approach has proved so successful that it is now being replicated elsewhere in Spain. For Emilio Diaz Muñoz, General Secretary of the FERE-CECA private school group, their CLIL programme – which has been running for six years - has delivered 'fabulous' results, enabling students to interact effectively with the global world of the 21st century. As Anthony Matthews, Cambridge English Centre Manager in Madrid, added, such CLIL initiatives not only increase exposure to English but also fundamentally change mentalities, with English no longer a 'subject' but an instrument for assimilating knowledge.

SESSION 3 – TEACHING ENGLISH

VIDEO: LANGUAGE TEACHING REFORM IN ITALY

Gisella Langé, Foreign Languages Inspector for the Italian Ministry of Education, described the impact of Italy's 2000-03 language reform project and associated legislation, which together 'changed the paradigm' for language learning and teaching in Italy. The Government-driven re-organisation of the school system provided an opportunity to redefine language teaching standards, and introduced a new and externally driven approach to assessment. But with English CLIL now mandatory for all final-year upper secondary school students, the challenge is how to prepare teachers – perhaps up to 20,000 in the longer term – for CLIL teaching. Many teachers responded positively to a Government request for involvement in CLIL, with the result that around 2,000 teachers are now undergoing CLIL training within Italian universities. The most important change, however, has been in mindset; teachers are embracing the new teaching methodologies, and are working together to identify new ways of delivering language learning.

SESSION 4 – TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE

VIDEO: ELECTRONIC LEARNING MATERIALS

Eric Baber, Account Support Director at Cambridge University Press, and Vice-President of IATEFL, focused on two key digital learning concepts. The first, MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) allow 'anyone anywhere' access to language training, but are only useful if courses are well scaffolded – allowing different users to find their own learning path – and technically reliable. The West is blasé about internet connectivity, but this is not the case worldwide and to Eric's knowledge, there is no multimedia- rich MOOC able to meet this challenge. MOOCs, however, could significantly improve teacher training, especially regarding academic and theoretical content, bringing a uniformity to global training standards. The second concept, the flipped classroom, is a blended-learning-style approach whereby students first learn at home before consolidating learning in the classroom, with teachers identifying problem areas in advance through online assessment. Looking forward, however, for Eric the biggest 'game changer' in digital learning will be the realisation that teachers need formal training in education technology – currently omitted from most teacher training programmes worldwide. As a result, use of education technology often depends on a teacher's personal interest in the subject, or the support of an organisation which sees value in these new tools.

SESSION 5 – USING ENGLISH

VIDEO: ENGLISH IN CHINA

Professor Xiangdong Gu of Chongqing University, China, described the transformation in Chinese language education that has taken place since 1983, when English became one of the most important subjects in the curriculum (equal to Chinese and mathematics), and also since 2001, when the Government decided that all students should learn a foreign language (primarily English) from the age of 9. China's national language curriculum, which extends from primary to university level, has delivered real improvements in linguistic ability. For example, in the 1980s the reading speed of pre-university students was 17 words per minute (wpm), whereas it is now 100 wpm, demonstrating the positive outcomes delivered by the changes which have taken place. These improvements will be sustained by increasing globalisation, and drivers such as social mobility, further education, and personal and professional development. However, research shows that teaching methods have not changed–learning remains teacher centred with the grammar/translation method still very influential. In-service training is therefore essential to help build confidence in teaching and speaking English, and to ensure constant improvement; international collaboration is one way to achieve this.

SESSION 1 - ASSESSING ENGLISH

A Systemic View of Assessment within an Educational Context – *Dr Nick Saville and Dr Neil Jones*

SESSION 2 - LEARNING ENGLISH

Profiling English in China: The Impact of Socio-Economic Context on Learning English – *Dr David Graddol*

Learning English as a Basic Skill: Is Younger Necessarily Better? – *Melanie Williams*

Integrating Content and English Language Learning in Schools: L1, B2, 3Ps? – *Kay Bentley*

SESSION 3 - TEACHING ENGLISH

The Native / Non-Native Conundrum Revisited – *Professor Péter Medgyes*

Teaching English in Mexico, a Matter of Public Policy –

Dr Juan Manuel Martínez García

SESSION 4 - TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE

The Future Directions of Technology-Supported Language Learning – *Michael Carrier*

Insights from Computational Linguistics in Teaching and Assessing Written English – *Professor Ted Briscoe*

Automatic Assessment of Spoken English: Challenges and Opportunities for Speech Technology – *Professor Mark Gales*

SESSION 5 - USING ENGLISH

Using English at Work: Learning and Using English on the Job – *Dr Kathleen M Bailey*

Using English for Professional Purposes – *Professor Tim McNamara*

The Multilingual City – *Dr Lid King*

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