Authenticity in assessment:
What does it mean?

1 April 2019 – IATEFL TEASIG pre-conference event
Dr John Pill

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An authenticity 'gap'?

I had to look at a diagram of the process and describe how to make it – there was a time limit, and it was very difficult to achieve in almost perfect English – how to make jam.

IELTS Academic Writing Task 1

describe and explain data, describe the stages of a process, how something works or describe an object or event
(IELTS information for candidates, 2019)

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-41010021 22 August 2017
https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/publications

BBC NEWS

Health

Do I have to understand jam-making to be a nurse?
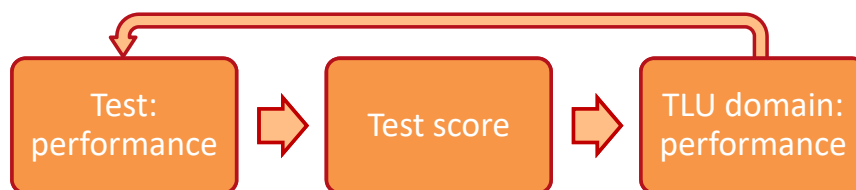
By Hugh Pym
Health editor

22 August 2017

Polina Ralutin thinks the language test is too difficult

Polina Ralutin was an experienced nurse in the Philippines and keen to take up a post in the NHS, at the Lister hospital, in Stevenage.

Basic assumptions

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specificity encompasses both authenticity and purpose
(Knoch & Macqueen, 2016)

real world = *target language use (TLU) domain*
(Bachman & Palmer, 1996)

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┌──────────────┐     ┌────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐
│    Test:     │ ──▶ │ Test score │ ──▶ │  TLU domain: │
│ performance  │     │            │     │  performance │
└──────────────┘     └────────────┘     └──────────────┘
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Authenticity promotes test-taker motivation and positive washback

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Authenticity of topic and text

Finance & economics

Authentic for:

Test takers
students starting university

Context of test
introductory course in finance, economics

Purpose of test
readiness to study in English, to read and interpret relevant texts

In London Savills, a consultancy, estimates that prime-property prices have fallen by 20% from their 2014 peak. Sales of homes worth over £1m are 20% lower than in 2016. Although Brexit has not helped, there are broader reasons for the slowdown, says Lucian Cook, head of research at Savills: falling cross-border capital flows; government policy; the cost of money; and increased supply.

The Economist. 9 March 2019. p. 65

Authentic texts in tests

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Challenges to authenticity

- Text changes when it is re-purposing as a test
- Change of context may require new wording, editing (assumptions of shared knowledge are lost)
- Text may not be suitable for test use
- Text formatting or presentation may change

- Text can be found on the Web quickly
- Copyright law affects text use

Authenticity of task

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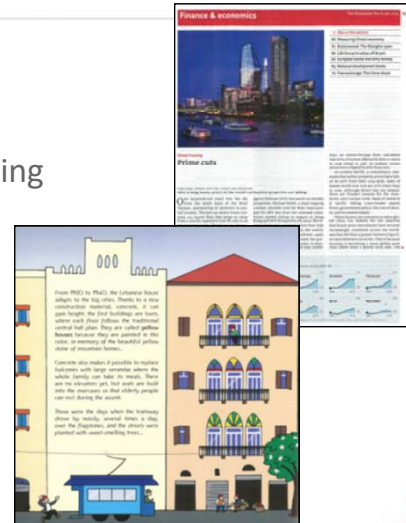
Skills

The tasks may require the test taker to:

- gain a sense of the text as a whole (gist)
- locate and distinguish main ideas and important information
- locate specific details
- summarize or paraphrase information
- recognize the use of cohesive and other structural devices in written text
- locate sequences, contrasts, causes and effects in the text
- make inferences/draw a conclusion based on information provided
- distinguish between fact and opinion
- infer the meaning of unfamiliar lexical items from their context
- recognize the writer's intention in context (e.g., sarcasm, advising)
- identify audience, purpose and genre of a text

http://www.aub.edu.lb/oira/Documents/Testing/AUB_EN%20information%20booklet.pdf

Authenticity of task

In paragraph III, the writer impl[...]

(A)   encourage innovation.
(B)   are often overwhelmin[...]
(C)*   demand many decision[...]
(D)   simplify content-sharin[...]

0	_____ E _____
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

A   ... has les[...]
B   ... gives y[...]
C   ... teaches
D   ... offers [...]
E   ... improv[...]
F   ... helps y[...]
G   ... focuses

1.   When did bronze vessels fir[...]
2.   Who were the vessels offere[...]
3.   Where were many of the ves[...]

1. _____ → 2. _____
3. _____

A superficially inauthentic task may prompt authentic cognitive processes (interactional authenticity)

Authenticity of task

Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE)
In the interactive phase:

• Take responsibility for the direction and maintenance of the interaction

• Utilise turn-taking conventions to ensure that the interaction flows and develops naturally

• Relate his or her own contributions closely to those of the examiner

Grade 10
The examiner will introduce the Interactive phase by saying:

In this task, I'll start by telling you something. You'll have to ask me questions to find out more information and make comments. It's your responsibility to maintain the conversation. Are you ready?

Language functions
▶ Developing an argument
▶ Defending a point of view
▶ Expressing beliefs
▶ Expressing opinions tentatively
▶ Summarising information, ideas and arguments
▶ Deducing

TRINITY COLLEGE LONDON

Grade 10 Interactive prompts
1. At my niece's school, homework is optional. Students only have to do it if they want to. I've even heard there's a move to get rid of it altogether.
2. Many people think that we should spend more time enjoying ourselves and less time trying to make money, but I'm not sure you can do one without the other.
3. I was listening to a talk about architecture the other day and the view presented was that all modern architecture is ugly.
4. A lot of people complain about graffiti in cities these days, but I'm not sure if I agree with them.
5. Recently there seems to have been a reaction against our technologically advanced society, with some people preferring to return to a simpler lifestyle. I think there's something to be said for this.
6. People often say that academic qualifications are the key to a child's future success. I'm not sure I completely agree.

https://www.trinitycollege.com/resource/?id=5755   https://www.trinitycollege.com/resource/?id=5731

https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/preparation-portal/free-sample-tests/writing-sample-test-1/

Aspects of authenticity

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TEST	⟷	'REAL WORLD'

1. Topics, texts and tasks **reflect** the TLU domain.

2. Tasks **prompt test-taker behaviour** that reflects behaviour in the TLU domain.

3. Criteria **capture features of test-taker performance** valued in the TLU domain.
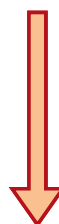
5

Weak and strong performance tests

Weak performance tests

*the focus is on language performance …
the purpose of the assessment is to elicit
a language sample so that second language
proficiency … may be assessed*

Strong performance tests

*performance will primarily be judged on
real-world criteria, that is, the fulfilment of
the task set*
(McNamara, 1996, pp. 43-44)

Original speaking test criteria

Overall Communicative Effectiveness

Intelligibility

Fluency

Appropriateness of Language

Resources of Grammar and Expression

Proposed speaking test criteria

Language

Overall Communicative Effectiveness

Intelligibility

Fluency

Appropriateness of Language

Resources of Grammar and Expression

Clinical communication

Clinician Engagement
- Professional manner
- Patient awareness

Management of Interaction
- Information-gathering
- Information-giving

(Elder et al., 2013; O'Hagan et al. 2014; Pill, 2016)

Implemented speaking test criteria

Linguistic criteria

Clinical Communication Criteria

https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/test-information/speaking/

Authenticity of criteria

Examples

- Cambridge First speaking test – **interactive communication** criterion
- Research into criteria for a test of English as a Lingua Franca

Competence area	Description
Accommodation	Making self intelligible to interlocutor
	Adjusting to interlocutor's speech style/accent
Negotiation	Clarification
	Self-repair
	Repetition
	Paraphrasing
Maintaining smooth interaction	Turn-taking
	Using appropriate politeness strategies

(Harding & McNamara, 2017)

Some final considerations

- Inauthenticity of separating tests into four skills – RLWS

- Can tests ever be completely authentic to real life?
  We are socialised to know what to expect of a test

- In any case, aren't tests themselves part of the real world?
  Tests have their own authenticity

  Authentic tests of language   vs   *Tests of authentic language*

  (Lewkowicz, 2000)

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