Highlights of International Academic Conferences

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国際学会における重要な論点

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Abstract

This paper presents summaries of the highlights of three academic conferences attended by the author concerning assessment development, the use of computers in applied linguistics, and international and intercultural communications. This report points out some of the recent trends and thinking in international language study including ESL.

Key words: proficiency-based assessments, international communication, ESL, CALL

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本稿は到達度評価、および応用言語学に於けるコンピューター使用、国際・異文化間コミュニケイションに関する三つの学会の中心論点の概要である。この報告は ESL を含む諸言語の研究に関しての学問的動向を述べたものである。

キーワード：到達度評価、国際コミュニケイション、異文化間コミュニケイション、ESL、CALL

Highlights of International Academic Conferences

Developing Proficiency-Based Assessments
in the Second Language Classroom
July 20-24, 1998

This five day summer institute for language teachers was held by the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota. The center is one of seven National Language Resource Centers in the United States. According to the introductory brochure, CARLA was established "to study multilingualism and multiculturalism, to develop knowledge of second language acquisition, and to advance the quality of second language teaching, learning, and assessment."

These goals are realized through conducting projects, sharing research, and applying the results to the "wider society." Part of this activity is the current offering of four summer institutes of which "Developing Proficiency Oriented Assessments" is one. Specific results include international conferences, a working paper series, and new forms of reading, writing, and speaking assessments. Listening assessments are in process.

"Intended for both veteran and novice second language teachers, as well as for administrators, this institute is primarily designed to examine the role that assessment plays in today's performance-based classroom" (from the CARLA home page 1 September 1999 〈http://carla.acad.umn.edu/assess-inst.html〉).

Items covered during the institute included a historical overview, evaluation of proficiency interviews, sample rubrics and scales, computer based assessment and internet use, and presentations by the participants.

Historical Overview

To provide background, the institute leader traced the current research back to the applied linguistic studies of the 1930s done during the "prescientific trend" and the "grammar-translation" era, through the 1950s, the time of the "psychometric-structuralist trend" of trying to measure mental ability, then to the "integrative-socialinguistic trend" which included the early use of cloze tests and assessment based mostly on sentence level structure, and up to the 1970s, to the "ethical-natural trend" a trend that was concerned with levels of language beyond sentence structure. However, the main impetus for the current National Language Resource Centers came from President Carter's forming of a task force to study

foreign language learning.

Daily Activities

Day 1—a.m.

Comparison of Achievement and Proficiency Assessments

There are many types of assessments available including those for diagnostic, placement, and specific purposes. To clarify the difference between proficiency assessments and other forms, a comparison was made to commonly used achievement assessments. It was pointed out that this is not a good/bad comparison, but simply a comparison of two methods. The chart below shows some of the aspects mentioned.

	ACHIEVEMENT	PROFICIENCY
1.	knowledge (specific defined content)	proficiency (able to use)
2.	discrete point (e. g. verb ending, subject/verb agreement)	integrative (e. g. phonology, syntax, etc. together)
3.	norm referenced (score compared to others)	criterion referenced (score referenced to criteria)
4.	language sample (any —e. g. vocabulary)	job work sample (specific vocabulary content task related)
5.	competence (idealized notion)	performance (commonly flawed)
6.	knowledge (in subject's head)	use (actually using the language)
7.	indirect (e. g. language tests)	direct (observed using language)
8.	concept awareness	control

Day 1—p.m.

The different phases of planning for the change to proficiency based testing were explained. They included starting with the "dean's task force" and proceeding through "convincing the constituency," "training, pilot testing, and phase-in" and ending with "full implementation and beyond."

Day 2—a. m.

An explanation of the Minnesota Articulation Project was given, primarily relating to French, German, and Spanish as the most commonly taught foreign languages in the U.S. A brief outline of common performance standards and proficiency based assessments instruments which lead to proficiency based strategies was given. More specifically some of the relationships to speaking and writing skills were explored., It was suggested that speaking assessments at the intermediate to low level on the ACTFL scale be performance based, easily administered to groups, and easily scored. Writing assessments at the intermediate to low level, should be arranged around one theme. Warm-ups should precede each task. They should elicit sentence level production and require students to "create" with the language. Later, we experimented briefly with making questions to fit Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and Simulated OPI (SOPI) situations.

Day 3—a. m.

Various factors involved in creating the Minnesota Performance Package were explained including test type, text content, cultural content, organizational choice of text, and pragmatic features.

Day 3—p. m.

After watching a video on the use of assessments, the large group was divided into groups of three or four participants for a discussion on "how to equate criteria based evaluation to grades." The results of the small groups were then shared with the entire group.

Day 4—a. m.

The criteria for moving from a traditional to a standards based educational system in Minnesota were explained, and the following three standards were described:

1. Content Standard are definitions of what the student should know and be able to do.

2. Benchmarks are components of the content standards identified for a particular grade level of schooling. They can be compared to "progress indicators" used elsewhere in national standards for learning foreign languages.

3. Performance Standards are actual guidelines for how well the students should be able to do the "content standards."

Scales are needed to judge these standards. It was pointed out as important to note

that English as a Second Language (ESL) standards are separate and are linked to academic study.

Checklists were said to be useful for indicating whether certain criteria or behavior is present.

Various rubrics were examined to show how they can be used to provide an indication of the quality of the performance. Holistic rubrics can be used to get an overall judgment or impression. Analytic rubrics are used for a specific target in the language such as grammar, vocabulary, organization, or content. It was noted that analytic rubrics usually provide more feedback, but increase administration time and sometimes detract from overall scoring.

Day 4—p.m.

This session was held in a computer lab. There was a brief description of how accountability and articulation relate to tests and assessment. The Graduate Proficiency Test (GPT) at the University of Minnesota, for example, is given at the end of the student's second year of language study. It has two purposes. First, it fulfills the College of Liberal Arts language requirement. Second, it is a prerequisite for entering a third-year course in a language.

Then the group used the computers to access and experiment with a writing test demo set up by the language center. Later, questions and opinions were shared with the entire group.

Day 5—a.m.

Some things that must be considered for all tests, but especially for rater scored tests were noted. These included "rater drift," where for one reason or another students of the same ability are given different scores by the same rater; the "halo effect" where a student is given a higher score for an unrelated reason; the "order effect" where the order of sections on a test cause differences in scoring; the "personal bias error" which is exemplified by all students receiving almost the same score when there is obviously variance; "fatigue"; and "motivation of the scorer." Some solutions for these problems were also presented.

Day 5—p.m.

The final afternoon was given to presentations by the participants. Working in pairs, the participants speculated on how institute information, materials, or activities might be used in their situation. Presentations were given concerning the teaching of Spanish, German, Italian, and Russian. One other presentation dealt with

the use of portfolios and rubrics for ESL composition. Another teacher from Japan and I tried to briefly explain the Japanese Entrance Exam system. The group was shocked to learn that questions from the entrance exams are not kept in a question pool and reused, especially when three exams are made each year. As a sidelight, one of the institute instructors did an several page analysis of a composition section of one of our past entrance exams. The instructor saw it as an achievement style test rather than a proficiency test and one which tests lexical and syntactic control not writing as a message or communication. She suggested that for a proficiency test the exercise task could be one "whose focus is communication [or] study-abroad readiness."

As promised, information from this institute should be helpful in creating assessment instruments and modifying current techniques. If the presentations are an accurate guide, all of the participants found one or more techniques to use for their language and level of students.

Computers in Applied Linguistics Conference (CALC)
(A Decade of Commitment)
July 9–13, 1994

Suitably, this conference was held at Iowa State University, the birthplace of the electronic digital computer built by Dr. John Vincent Atanasoff and his graduate student assistant, Clifford E. Berry.

The purpose of the conference was to provide an opportunity to become aware of "state-of-the-art" teaching and research methods and available software. Over 40 papers, four plenary sessions, and eleven workshops were offered.

I was able to attend three of the four plenary sessions. One by Sue Otto and Jan Pusaek was an explanation of three multimedia programs, the current availability of software, the effects of multimedia on faculty, and new and changing career choices. Donna Mydlarski gave another plenary titled "Applying the Cooperative Model to CALL," and argued that computer assisted language learning can improve cooperation among learners on social, cognitive, and economic levels, but also involves courseware developers and other language professionals. In the final plenary, Joan Jamison related the history of CALL and gave expectations for the 90s including an increase in networking and possible changes in the ways multimedia will be made available.

Scheduling permitted me to attend only two workshops. The first of these was "Word Processing for ESL Writers" presented by Helen Schmidt and Jennifer Thornburg. They demonstrated a technique to enable students of all levels of proficiency to write essays and create newsletters. The second workshop was "An Introduction to Computer Assisted Language Testing." Susan Chyn from the Educational Testing Service (ETS) introduced theoretical and practical issues in computer-assisted language testing. She also reviewed examples of computer assisted tests available from ETS.

Among the shorter presentations I attended were an introduction to DASHER, which was a brief description of a software program for creating exercises in several different languages (unfortunately, it does not include exercises for Japanese), and "Computer Assisted Syllabus Design for the ESL Classroom" in which the presenter argued that students provided with a syllabus at the beginning of a course are more successful in the course.

As might be expected, the gist of the conference was that computers will play an increasing role in language learning in the near future especially as computer hardware improves and more developers provide more software.

InterComm
Symposium on Professional Communication
in An International and Multicultural Context
July 29–31, 1994

According to the TESOL Institute Catalog, "this symposium is designed to make connections among professionals from a number of perspectives (for example, rhetoric, technical and business communication, applied linguistics, English for special purposes, world Englishes) with interests in professional communication in an international and multicultural context. This symposium was held at Iowa State University.

Even though it was only a two and a half day conference, I was able to attend presentations on Desktop Video Conferencing, Internationalizing Visual Language, Non–native English and International Communications, International Business Communications, Building Cross–Cultural Collaboration in an ESL Writing Class, and The Rhetoric of Transition in Central and Eastern Europe.

Of these presentations, most dealt with business situations and were, therefore, not readily or directly adaptable to teaching situations. However, the ESL presentation was a follow up to the word processing for ESL writers workshop that I attended at the CALC conference, so the presentation provided supplementary material and related it to promoting cross–cultural teamwork in writing. The presentation on changes in central and east European rhetoric because of new and changing political and economic situations was among the more interesting though from a historical rather than pedagogical point of view.

Overall, the three conferences summarized in this report proved to be a good blend of practical, theoretical, and background information, and the information gained from them has been and will be helpful in designing course plans and syllabi, future curriculum, as well as tests and assessments.