

Birmingham/Melbourne Summer School in Applied Linguistics

University of Birmingham, UK, and University of Melbourne, Australia

Birmingham 2-13th July 2012

Course outlines

Language testing

Tim McNamara

This course introduces some of the conceptual issues in the development and validation of language tests, particularly when tests are used as instruments of policy. Language testing has, since the beginning of the field, been a central activity within applied linguistics. It has a practical goal – the design and implementation of tests that can survive the stringent demands of the conditions (time, cost, availability, and so on) under which they must operate. Language testing thus resembles areas of applied linguistics such as curriculum design, where the outcome of the research is a tangible, usable product. Much of the expertise that is required for the successful construction of practical, usable tests is technical, so that language testing is often seen as a somewhat specialized and technically complex field. However, it is also a theoretically rich field. In order to conceptualize the threats to the meaningfulness of test scores, a complex theory of test validity has been developed. Understanding validity as a primary focus of the course is also the basis for practical insight into threats to validity in the development and implementation of tests.

Moreover, language tests occupy important roles in contemporary society, especially in gatekeeping, that is, in allowing access to membership of valued social groups, and to opportunities for personal advancement. Language tests are also used to control immigrant flows, to determine rights to residency and citizenship, to control access to educational settings, and to regulate access to work settings, among other functions. More and more, language tests are thus used as policy instruments, for declared and undeclared policies (Shohamy, 2001, 2006). How can we reconcile the multiple perspectives on the necessary character of language tests? Are they incommensurable? The course aims to explore the nature of this question.

Required text: McNamara, T & C Roever (2006). *Language Testing: The Social Dimension*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Pre-course reading: McNamara, T (2000). *Language Testing*. Oxford: OUP.

Multilingualism

Adrian Blackledge and Angela Creese

This course introduces contemporary understandings of research in multilingualism, introduces practical and theoretical approaches to investigating language use in multilingual settings, and offers participants the opportunity to share their own and others' original multilingual data in a 'data workshop'. Adrian Blackledge and Angela Creese will present aspects of their own recent ethnographic research in multilingual settings in the United Kingdom. In doing so they will introduce a critical sociolinguistic perspective which views language use as situated in social, historical, and political contexts. The course particularly considers linguistic ethnography as a lens through which to view multilingualism in practice.

Current terminology circulating in academic research on multilingualism will be introduced, including concepts such as 'translanguaging', 'polylingualism', and 'heteroglossia'. Theoretical concepts related to multilingualism will be illustrated and exemplified with examples from recent research in multilingual cities. Practical approaches to investigating multilingual communities will be considered. The course will include discussion of methods of collection of linguistic data, including field notes, and audio-recorded and video-recorded spoken interactions. The programme will include introduction to practical steps in the analysis of multilingual linguistic data. In addition, there will be an opportunity for participants to bring to the course a brief section of their own data, for discussion by the group in a 'data workshop'. This will offer participants a setting in which to share their data and elicit supportive feedback.

Academic writing

Neomy Storch

The University of Melbourne

Being able to produce a text which is considered appropriate for an academic readership is difficult for native speakers, and ever more so, for second language writers. In this subject we deal not only with what defines academic writing, but also with how best to teach and assess academic writing as well as conduct research on issues pertinent to academic writing. Thus the subject is of relevance to writing teachers and researchers. We begin with the important concept of academic literacy, discussing the various definitions offered by scholars and the linguistic and rhetorical features that are said to distinguish academic writing. We analyse texts from a range of disciplines and produced by writers from different cultural backgrounds to identify possible variations across disciplines and cultures. Session 2 focuses on writing instruction, discussing and exemplifying the various approaches that have been adopted to teach academic writing and the theoretical bases underlying these approaches. In this session we also deal with the topic of use of sources, and the contentious topic of plagiarism. Session 3 focuses on an issue closely related to teaching writing: the provision of feedback on writing. In this session we consider the types of feedback available (direct, indirect), sources of feedback (teacher, peer, online) and the debate raging in the literature on whether feedback on language use makes a difference. In Session 4 we look at how best to assess writing and writing development, looking at a range of measures available to teachers and researchers. In the final session, we look at some of the factors that may affect not only composing processes but also the quality of the written text produced. To gauge the effect of these factors we employ some of the measures introduced in the previous session.

Corpus Linguistics

Susan Hunston and Paul Thompson

This course will provide an introduction to the field of corpus linguistics, with a strong emphasis on the contribution of corpus research to fresh perspectives on language. As Sinclair (1991: 100) observed, '... language looks different when you look at a lot of it at once', and one aspect of this is that the prevalence and importance of phraseology comes to the fore.

In this course, we will review research into phraseology and explore the concept of 'semantic sequences' (Hunston 2008): that is, series of meaning elements which can be shown to occur regularly in either a general or a specific corpus. The course will also focus on corpus approaches to the study of variation in language use by examining how semantic sequences vary in use within different discourse communities, by analysing data from specialised corpora.

Participants will have the opportunity to engage in hands-on investigation of corpus data in a computer lab, and will also be invited to discuss different approaches to the interpretation of concordances and frequency lists. There will also be a 'clinic' session in which participants will be able to discuss corpus-related research ideas and questions with a lecturer.

References:

Hunston, S. (2008) Starting with the small words: Patterns, lexis and semantic sequences *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* 13/3: 271-295

Sinclair, J. (1991) *Corpus, concordance, collocation* Oxford: Oxford University Press

