

<p>Institution: University of Bedfordshire</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 29 – English Language and Literature</p>
<p>a. Context: The Centre for Research in English Language Learning and Assessment (CRELLA) conducts research into general English language proficiency levels and improved methodologies for their assessment, and into testing the specific domain of academic English. Research activity derives from the innovative socio-cognitive framework (SCF) for language test development and validation, comprehensively articulated in Shaw and Weir's (2007) <i>Examining Writing</i>. From 2008 to 2013 this framework was progressively refined for all four language skills in light of on-going research. Main beneficiaries, audiences and non-academic user groups for CRELLA's research include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leading examination boards and other test providers (e.g., Cambridge English Language Assessment (CELA), Trinity College London, English Language Testing Ltd (ELT) and the British Council in the UK, the Eiken Foundation of Japan (formerly STEP), and the Language Training and Testing Center (LTTC) in Taiwan)) • ministries of education (e.g., Singapore, Russia) • universities and professional bodies worldwide (e.g., Zayed University UAE, Universidad Veracruzana Mexico, Bilkent University Turkey) • professional practitioners in the wider language assessment community (e.g., regular courses for members of the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) 2008-13) • language learners and their teachers worldwide (e.g., Kaplan group, English Profile Project). <p>By applying CRELLA's groundbreaking research to the development and validation of existing and new high-stakes English proficiency tests, the following types of impact have been achieved:</p> <p>i) economic prosperity: increased candidature/revenue for existing exam providers (e.g., CELA general English tests; IELTS); successful introduction of new commercial products (e.g., ELT <i>Password</i>, British Council <i>Aptis</i> and the <i>International Language Assessment (ILA)</i>).</p> <p>ii) education: improved selection/gate-keeping procedures for entry to academic and commercial institutions; better targeted remedial language instruction where needed (diagnostic language assessment); improvements to existing syllabuses and curricula in modern language education (e.g., <i>English Profile Programme</i>); enhanced English language learning across educational systems through the introduction of international test certification (e.g., the use of the CELA examinations in <i>The Progetto Lingue</i> in Italy).</p> <p>iii) public discourse: provision of professional development and training in assessment to improve understanding of testing issues in both professional and public domains (e.g., ALTE, ProSET; see biii below).</p>
<p>b. Approach to impact: The socio-cognitive framework (SCF) and its application to practice are designed to (i) benefit commercial test providers, (ii) enhance language education and (iii) improve assessment literacy and practice. The SCF marks the first systematic attempt at providing assessment stakeholders with a coherent and accessible methodology for test development and validation research, covering social, cognitive and evaluative (scoring) dimensions of language use and linking these to the context and consequences of test use, including language teaching and learning. The framework provides for theoretical consideration of the issues but can also be applied practically for critical analyses of test content; it therefore has direct relevance and value to operational language testing, especially when such testing is conducted on an industrial scale. While other frameworks developed during the 1990s (e.g., Bachman's 1990 Communicative Language Ability model and the Council of Europe's 2001 Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)) undoubtedly helped end users to consider key issues from a theoretical perspective, they generally proved unworkable for examination boards and – importantly in relation to current emphasis on the test taker – lacked a cognitive dimension.</p> <p>i) Economic prosperity: working closely with commercial testing organisations to build their businesses through improved assessment services:</p> <p>CRELLA's approach to impact is to work closely with testing organisations, applying its socio-cognitive framework to their assessment policies and products to improve the quality of their language proficiency tests. CRELLA's research enables providers of high-stakes assessment tools to assemble the necessary logical and empirical evidence to support claims about a test's technical standards and usefulness. As a result, test developers and providers have revisited their test designs and reframed their validity arguments in new and more effective ways to demonstrate</p>

evidence of test quality and fitness for purpose (see Case Studies 1 and 2 below for examples).

– **Collaboration with Cambridge English Language Assessment:** A good example of interaction and relationship-building with key users of CRELLA's research is reflected in our work with the commercial testing organisation, Cambridge English Language Assessment (CELA). Four recently published volumes, co-authored by CRELLA staff in collaboration with CELA colleagues for Cambridge University Press (Shaw and **Weir** 2007, Khalifa and **Weir** 2009, **Taylor** (ed) 2011, Geranpayeh and **Taylor** (eds) 2013), exemplify how the framework provided CELA with an accessible methodology, derived from latest theoretical and empirical research, for the practical design, validation and improvement of their multi-level English as a Second Language examinations covering four skills (writing, reading, speaking and listening) (see Case Study 2). The framework has also been successfully applied to the Cambridge specific-purpose English tests across diverse domains, including legal, financial and business.

– **Collaboration with other high stakes test providers:** CRELLA has worked closely with other examination boards and ministries of education in applying the framework to define and operationalise second language proficiency levels for assessment purposes. Collaborators include: The British Council for *IELTS*, *ILA* and *Aptis*; English Language Testing for *Password*, *Password Arabia* and *Password Pupil*; Eiken Foundation of Japan for *Eiken* and *TEAP*; Trinity College London for *GESE* and *ISE* and LTTC Taiwan for *GEPT*. Nine staff members from these organisations subsequently studied for PhDs at CRELLA to deepen their theoretical understanding and develop their empirical skills for their working context. CRELLA's research guided other language test development projects in the UK (City and Guilds and UCLEB), China (CET), Japan (The Japan Foundation), Macedonia (Sts Cyril and Methodius University), Malaysia (UITM), Mexico (Veracruz University), Saudi Arabia (King Saud University), Turkey (Bogazici, Bilkent and Sabanci Universities), UAE (Zayed University) and Hong Kong (City University, Hong Kong). Many of these projects were undertaken with consultancy input from CRELLA staff members, who often went on to provide continuing support for the research and validation programme set up for tests.

ii) Education: working closely with decision makers and practitioners to strengthen links between language learning and assessment

CRELLA's socio-cognitive framework (SCF) provides a theoretically defensible yet practical basis for characterising language learning tasks at the various CEFR levels, with clear potential to inform future Reference Level Descriptions development (www.coe.int/t/dq4/linguistic/dnr_en.asp). Two examples of this are:

– **English Profile (EP):** CRELLA's SCF was adopted by EP, a multi-disciplinary programme of CEFR related research, part funded by EU Lifelong learning (www.englishprofile.org). Through CRELLA's dissemination activities, EP is already influencing large-scale projects worldwide, e.g., the Japanese adaptation of the CEFR for their national English language education system (Japanese Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research); and the FYROM syllabus framework for Modern Foreign Languages (TEMPUS IV), thus extending the application of the SCF even further. EP informs practical task design in pedagogy, materials development and curriculum planning worldwide, as well as supporting effective teaching and learning at different educational levels.

– **The trans-European Surveylang project:** CRELLA's SCF was selected for use in the European Survey on Language Competences funded by the European Commission (www.surveylang.org). *The Technical Report of the European Commission on the First European Survey on Language Competences* (2012:15) states: "The socio-cognitive validation framework proposed by Weir ... was adopted as the means to identify the sub skills to be tested...[it] provides useful practical models of language skills as cognitive processes and ways of refining a description of progression. It allows us to describe progression across the CEFR levels to be surveyed in a way which practically informs test design and item writing" (ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/index.html).

iii) Public discourse: working with language teaching and testing practitioners worldwide to provide professional development and training in language assessment

The SCF has been extensively used by CRELLA staff members as the theoretical and practical basis for professional development and training courses worldwide.

–**Training courses, lectures, conferences and seminars:** To help promote assessment literacy worldwide since 2008, CRELLA staff have carried out regular dissemination activities (total audience of 17,000+). As well as 158 conference presentations, 89 seminars and courses were provided for examination board staff, teachers and a wide range of stakeholders, often in collaboration with major testing organisations (e.g., ALTE in Europe, LTTC in Taiwan, Cambridge

English Language Assessment and Eiken Foundation of Japan).

– **Pre-service and in-service teacher training:** The SCF has been strategically applied in teacher education and in the classroom, e.g., in assessment literacy projects for teachers with Ministries of Education in Singapore and Ethiopia. CRELLA’s SCF underpins teacher training modules on assessment literacy in institutions throughout Russia through PROSET, a €1 million EU funded project. CRELLA coordinates the project (2011-13) in cooperation with the Russian Ministry of Education and Science and a consortium of 11 Russian universities. PROSET contributes to the Russian National Qualifications Framework through capacity building and developing expertise in language testing and assessment, and contributes to the comparability of university curricula and the quality of teacher qualifications for schools. University programmes and the wider practice of teaching and assessment in secondary schools across the Russian Federation are directly impacted. It also promotes EU-Russia inter-university co-operation and encourages international standards in the Russian regions.

c. Strategy and plans

i) Close collaboration with industry: CRELLA intends to strengthen its pathways to impact with the world’s leading examination boards and test providers by: 1) engaging in joint research and publication with their staff members; 2) encouraging proposals for PhDs in assessment from their staff members; 3) serving on the research/advisory boards of these organisations and international testing committees, e.g., **Weir** is Chairman of the British Council Assessment Advisory Board from 2013 and **Green** will be President of the International Language Testing Association (ILTA) from end 2014; 4) securing new and/or extended, research agreements with exam providers, such as the memorandum of agreement signed with the British Council for 2013-15; the research contracts with Eiken Foundation of Japan 2013-15 and *Password* 2014-2016; 5) demonstrating to other examination boards the value of the socio-cognitive approach for their test development and validation; 6) working with client organisations to embrace impact by design at the project planning stage and evaluating project impact on stakeholders through baseline and follow up studies.

ii) Strengthen links between language learning and assessment: CRELLA will establish links with governmental agencies worldwide to embed the socio-cognitive approach in the development and validation of their school language examinations as part of a learner-centred curriculum. It will advise organisations on how to apply EP research findings in English language provision (as in the revision of the Course of Study for Japanese schools).

iii) Dissemination and training: CRELLA will promote understanding of the socio-cognitive approach to assessment by: publishing our work in this area in major international refereed journals, and with respected publishers such as Cambridge University Press; funding a strong CRELLA presence at national and international conferences to present our research and its applications; and expanding the CRELLA website to make our work more accessible to the global assessment community.

iv) Systemic change: We will improve our information management systems to capture, monitor and track impact; build human capacity to deliver impact; facilitate junior staff engagement with impact through close mentoring by senior staff; and appoint only outstanding staff with clear potential for increasing impact.

d. Relationship to case studies

CASE STUDY 1: Enhancing the international higher education experience through clearer specification of Academic English proficiency and through improved assessment products and practice. Case Study 1 describes and evaluates CRELLA’s research into the nature and assessment of academic English skills as they impact on higher education. Accurate assessment of students’ academic language abilities is of vital importance to receiving institutions.

CASE STUDY 2: Redefining English proficiency levels for second language education through our ground-breaking socio-cognitive framework for constructing and validating language tests. Case Study 2 focuses on CRELLA’s contribution to clarifying the nature of proficiency levels for English as a Second Language, particularly the criterial features distinguishing one level from another. It explains the impact of CRELLA’s research on major international test providers, helping them to achieve test quality to secure recognition and accreditation. This enhances economic opportunity and international mobility for test users and brings economic benefits for test providers.