"I can't come to the words": Assessment Guiding Flexible Course Design

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FORSVARET
Presentation Outline

- ✔ Washback Revisited
- ✗ The JTAC Predicament Revisited
- 🏥 The OPI+ Revisited
- 🎥 OPI+ for JTACs: Lessons Learned
- 🎬 The OPI+ Guiding Flexible Course Design
Washback & JTAC Revisited

Washback

- Co-dependent relationship between teaching and testing, each should inform the other.

- Effective use of positive washback helps minimize construct under-representation and construct-irrelevant difficulty (Messick, 1996).

The JTAC predicament

- NATO SLP requirement for non-native speaker JTACs is 3332 iaw STANAG 6001.

- Disconnect between assumed ability to function in a language for specific purposes (LSP) environment based on performance on a general language proficiency (GLP) test.
The OPI+ for Norwegian JTACs

The OPI+ revisited

- The OPI+ integrates professional content domains in the standard OPI, demonstrating how linguistic functions in GLP level descriptors can reliably be elicited within the frame of specific-purpose target language use (TLU).

The present study

- Small-scale study
- Explore OPI+ format
  – improved results?
  – face validity?
- Hybrid test developed
Yes. Yeah, I think I’ve seen that room before – I see two guys in military uniform – they both are – eh – wearing – eh – headphones, they’re looking on some kind of wide screen, with mountains and blue heaven. Eh… yeah, there is a road going – eh – or maybe a river – or a roads, and on the top of the hill, there is – or not on the top, but like in the middle of picture - is some black smoke, I think, coming up towards the sky. Eh… Yeah, we have summits and mountains – eh – eh – yeah, there is trees - some trees, I’m not sure what we have – like the big part in the middle, if there is just a field or if it’s maybe water – eh – yeah, and the two guys on the picture, they are sitting on – on their knees, eh, both are looking on the screen, there is at least two –eh – iPads or something – eh – right down there the – the big widescreen. Eh… yeah.
Example of JTAC OPI+ L3 elicitation – abstract matter (mil)

What consequences might new appearance regulations such as these have for the military’s image?

That both genders are allowed to wear make-up? Eh – I think if – eh – I don’t know if it has something to say, but – eh – yeah, I don’t want my guys, in my unit, to wear make-up, because it would look weird, and I think if you are in the... Yeah, maybe it sounds weird, but I think it looks weird if men in uniform would wear make-up and – and you should look – I don’t think maybe you would make an so professional, I guess, but – eh – yeah, that could be sad also, because people are different, and at the same time, if a man wants to wear make-up – eh – he should be allowed, but... I can – I think in the military, in a soldier, maybe you should – if I met a guy with make-up, eh, during a fight out there, I would probably choose him in front of – eh – the guy without make-up, and – just because of – maybe he looks tougher, the guy without... I don’t know.
Assessment test taker no. 5, iaw STANAG 6001 (holistic)

Candidate can

– narrate and describe
– give directions and instructions
– use basic grammatical structures
– combine and link paragraphs

However...

– L2 approach to L3 tasks
– topics never lifted to abstract level
– (fairly) limited lexical range
– perceived fluency better at L2

Demonstrated limited comprehension at L3, but lacked the linguistic resources to formulate appropriate responses at that level
The JTAC OPI+
Lessons Learned

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔</td>
<td>L2 tasks worked well - and were seemingly closer to JTAC TLU</td>
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<tr>
<td>🎧</td>
<td>Participatory listening – very relevant for JTAC TLU. Should be further explored by testers and raters.</td>
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<td>L3 military context tasks generally elicited more language from L2 candidates, and made L3 candidates talk faster (WPM/SPM).</td>
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<td>⚠️</td>
<td>Test takers did not speak at a higher level when test content had a military flavour.</td>
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<td>When the linguistic functions tested are the same, context does not seem to significantly matter.</td>
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<td>🎈</td>
<td>Nevertheless – and with a view to face validity...</td>
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JTAC OPI+
Face validity

The majority of JTAC test takers agreed

- Speaking about military contexts
  - was easier (66%)
  - was more interesting (55%)
  - made them feel more relaxed (90%)

- Good mix of topics in test (100%)

- The full range of their English speaking ability had been tested (66%)

* But: split on the question of the relevance of test content and tasks to their work.
I can't come to the words – where to go from here?

In our JTAC sample, one in four test takers was rated L3 (N=28).

JTACs need English language training to reach STANAG L3 in speaking.

How might OPI+ testing guide course design?
Flexible Course Design

Gap Analysis

- Identify whether there is a learning or performance gap by comparing current and desired states
- Are current capabilities aligned with mission requirements?
- If there is a gap, specifying the nature of the gap to understand how to best close the gap or align the current and desired states
- Determine potential solution(s)
- If training is best solution to close the gap, a training needs assessment is required to support training development.

Specified Training Need

- Increase alignment of curriculum to capability requirements
- Curriculum should focus on developing required capabilities
- Minimize negative impacts of “teaching to the test” by aligning curriculum with the required capabilities
Flexible Course Design

Specified Assessment Need

- Increase alignment of metric to capability requirements
- Test should measure examinees’ ability to conduct individual tasks related to enduring capabilities
- Minimize negative impacts of “teaching to the test” by purposely aligning assessment with the required capabilities (i.e., create positive washback)

Operational Gap

- A gap exists between how an Operator needs to use language and how an Operator’s language ability is trained.
- A gap exists between how an Operator needs to use language and how an Operator’s language ability is assessed.
- Need a curriculum and aligned assessment which answer the question: Are SOF operators ready to use the target language to accomplish their unique missions effectively?
Flexible Course Design

Modular Course Design

- Curricular Design Focus
  - Grammatical
  - Notional
  - Thematic

- Instructional Approach
  - Communicative
  - Task-Based

ADDIE Model
Flexible Course Design Informed by OPI+

JTAC Example
- Operational Gap
- Can Do’s
- Compensation Strategies
- Non-Compensatory Elements
- Fill in the Gaps

Plan of Instruction (POI)
- Narrow Scope of POI
  - Linguistic Functions
  - Content/Context Domains
- Balanced Levels of Input/Output
  - Instruction
  - Performance/Assessment
Reading list

- Arnó-Macià, E., & Mancho-Barés, G. (2015). The role of content and language in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) at university: Challenges and implications for ESP. *English for Specific Purposes*, 37, 63-73. DOI: 10.1016/j.esp.2014.06.007