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Tests as texts: investigating test questions from a sociolinguistic perspective

Conference Paper Abstract

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Abstract

Assessment has the potential to transform teaching and learning. For this potential to be realised, the tools via which assessment is performed need to be understood in depth. One of the most commonly used assessment tools in education is the written test. To date, written tests have been investigated mainly as measurement tools or as socio-political constructs. However, they are neither merely measurement tools nor merely socio-political constructs. In the first instance, they are linguistic entities, or texts. In an attempt to illuminate this less recognised facet of tests, this study investigated written tests from a sociolinguistic perspective. The study was informed by sociolinguistic theory that suggests that the linguistic features of a text are not arbitrary but are dictated by the situational context of communication (e.g. who is writing, for whom, for what purpose). Drawing on this theory, this research sought to understand the linguistic design of written questions both at a structural and a functional level. Specifically, it aimed to (a) identify the most common linguistic features of written questions and, (b) explain their prevalence by reference to the situational context. This presentation will report the findings of the study and discuss their implications.

Full paper:

Constantinou, F. (2020): Examination questions as a form of communication between the examiner and the examinee: a sociolinguistic perspective on assessment practice.

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