



WORKSHOP H

Issues in Web-based Testing

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ABSTRACT

There has been an increasing interest in web-based testing in foreign and second language programs. Among the advantages of web-based testing is its cost-effectiveness, its ability to test asynchronously, and its ability to provide almost instantaneous feedback to the examinee. However, it also has disadvantages. There are problems with test security, the need for some technical skills, and the need for computer hardware and its maintenance. Furthermore, because of its relative ease, web-based assessment introduces issues of test design. These issues often relate to such questions as: Is a web-based test simply a paper-and-pencil test in a web-based format? What available bells-and-whistles are appropriate to include on a language test before they become distracting? What kinds of feedback are appropriate for the learner? These issues will be discussed in this workshop and the workshop participants will critique current web-based tests that are online in a hands-on manner. Criteria for successful language testing websites will be developed and discussed.

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Features to avoid on web pages

Dr. Tom Hudson discussed some of the following general features to avoid on web pages:

- Over-use of 'leading- edge' technology (heavy graphics)

- Scrolling text, marquees, and animations – this slows down reading and downloading
- Complex URLs – typo error may occur
- Orphan pages – usually blank pages
- Long scrolling pages – affect reading
- No navigation support – difficult to access to links
- Non-standard link colors – readers may not be aware of their existence
- Outdated information – not current or relevant
- Long download times- cost involved in dialing up
- Animated GIFS – can be a distractor
- Fixed-width tables – not suitable for all types of computers
- Unnecessary image maps – can get lost while navigating
- Dead links – frustrate reader as he can't find way back
- Oversized, un-optimised graphics – waste of space and time downloading it
- Pages that open new browser windows – readers can get lost

To illustrate the above points he went through some of the websites with the course participants.

Web-based test evaluations

Course participants were asked to go to the website URL <http://www@.hawaii.edu/~tdh/testsite4evaluation.html>. This site contains many examples of web-based tests. In groups, course participants took about an hour to look at these sites and to evaluate them against the following questions. Two people in each group were assigned to take notes on the test and to discuss any emerging issues as a larger group at the end of the workshop.

Questions:

1. What and whom are the tests for?
2. What are the tests to be used for?

3. What language skills are being tested? To what extent to the different tests consistently test the same skill?
4. How does the test focus the examinee's expectations and activities?
5. What kinds of affective features are involved (explicitly and implicitly)?
6. Is special technical knowledge required?
7. Which browsers do the tests work with?
8. How clear are instructions?
9. How easy is it to navigate through the various parts?
10. How effective are the tests at using the screen "real estate"?
11. What kind of scores or feedback is provided?
12. What consequential issues are problematic (now or potentially) for the test?
13. How do different tests require different information from the examinee?
14. What types of practice tests/exercises are provided by the different tests?
15. What assumptions are made about the examinee's language ability (or content ability) by the different tests?
16. As you begin, how would you as a learner intend to use the information from the tests?
17. How do different tests guide the examinee around in the test?
18. What differences are there in the way you submit answers?
19. How do the tests differ in whether they let the examinee go back to previous questions or sections?
20. How do the different tests address the issue of consistent format internally?
21. What potential problems might exist because of the format?
22. What potential problems might exist because of the content?
23. What, if any, cultural biases appear to be present?
24. How efficient do the tests appear to be?
25. To what extent is the test an indirect measure versus a performance assessment?
26. Are the tests sufficiently comprehensive? (Think in terms of construct representativeness)

Issues/concerns raised by participants and responses from presenter/panelists:

No.	<i>Issues/Concerns raised by participants</i>	<i>Presenter's/Panelists' responses</i>
1.	<p>Marcia Frisk Ong (ELTC)</p> <p>What is the purpose of web-based testing?</p>	<p>Suited for low stake tests e.g. self-access learning</p>
2.	<p>Mawarni Hassan (Examination syndicate)</p> <p>Most of the tests are linear and are no different from pen and paper tests.</p>	<p>Agreed</p>
3.	<p>Christine Coombe (Dubai Men's College)</p> <p>Besides Hot Potatoes, are there other softwares suitable for designing tests?</p>	<p>Dreamweaver and Java Script</p>