Linguaskill

Reading

For New Linguaskill and New Linguaskill Business

Version 1.0

CAMBRIDGE English

New Linguaskill is a modular online multi-level test of English language proficiency produced by Cambridge. One of the components is a test of Reading. As mentioned in the overview[1], Weir's model of socio-cognitive competence does not mention construct validity explicitly, because within the model, the reading construct is drawn from the context, cognitive and scoring elements. In order to provide evidence of how well Linguaskill measures what it is supposed or intended to measure, our institutional approach is to consider how the reading tasks relate to language activities in the real world, in terms of how well they replicate those language behaviours (a mix of contextual and cognitive validity). Our institutional approach to reading is summarised in the model put forward by Cyril Weir and Hanah Khalifa (Weir and Khalifa 2008), which is itself based on the socio-cognitive framework. This model is summarised in Figure 1.

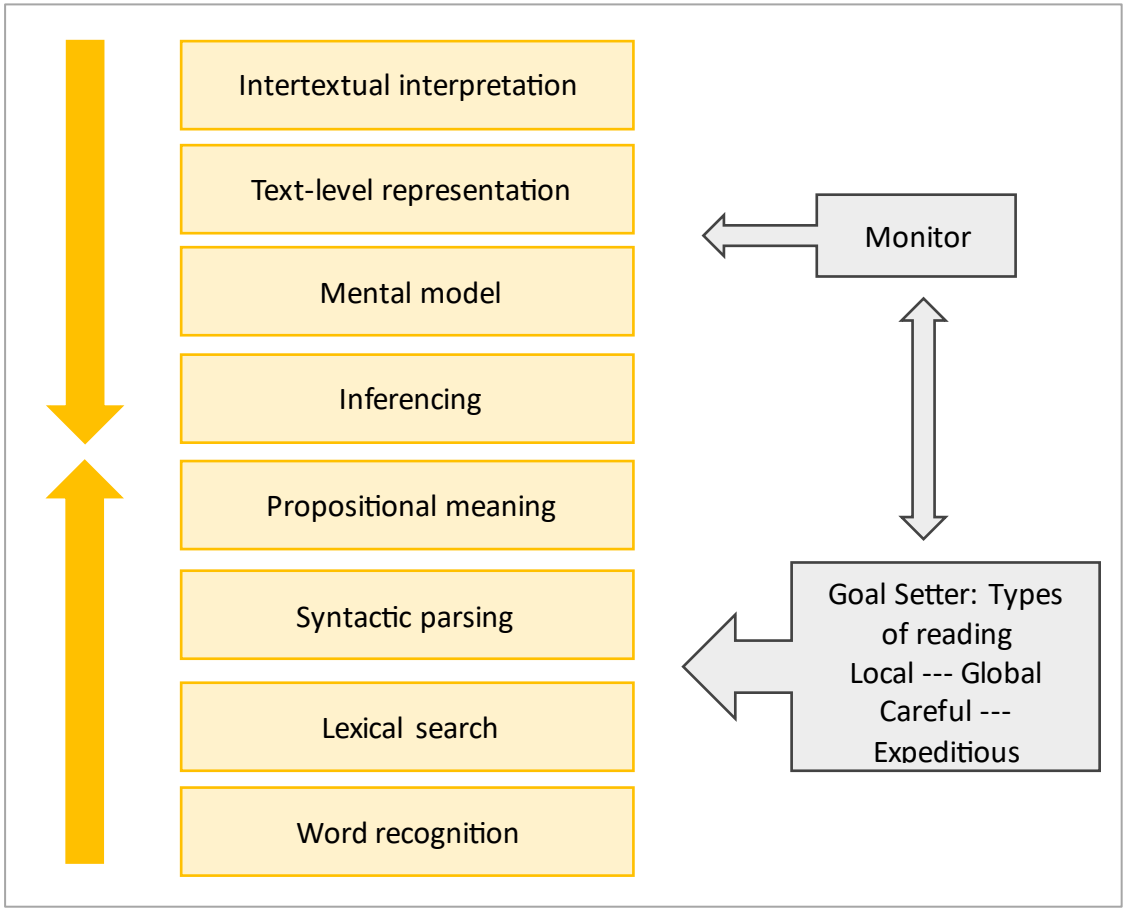

Figure 1 A model of Reading, adapted Khalifa and Weir (2008)

The model portrays reading as a set of metacognitive activities (e.g. deciding the purpose of reading, and whether it needs to be local or global, careful or expeditious) that trigger and monitor the cognitive processes needed to complete a reading task. Various forms of knowledge (e.g. lexical, syntactic, etc.) feed into the cognitive processes to enable successful reading comprehension. The model consists of bottom-up processes, such as word recognition and lexical search, and top-down processes such as text level representation and building a mental model of the text.

[1]See *New Linguaskill Overview* document for more information on these terms and Weir's (2005) socio-cognitive framework

As the reader builds up a model of the content and purpose of the text, they engage in monitoring, checking and remediation in terms of their understanding of the text so far. Depending on the level of ability of the learner, and the difficulty of the text, some of the higher level cognitive processes may not be engaged in, for example if the learner is struggling with syntactic and lexical aspects of the text.

There are a number of task types in use for Linguaskill Reading, which link to the types of reading activities (global, local, careful and expeditious) and cognitive processes (lexical access, syntactic parsing etc) listed in the model. For example, readers engage in careful, local reading to understand sentence level meaning, whereas careful global reading is required to understand the overall text. Scanning for specific information requires expeditious local reading, whereas searching for important details and skimming for gist require expeditious global reading. The task types in use in Linguaskill Reading are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Reading tasks in New Linguaskill

Task type	Task description	Testing focus	Cognitive processes & CEFR Level
Open Cloze	A text with 5 gaps, each to be filled with a single grammatical word. The length of the text may range between 60 - 150 words depending on the level.	This task is designed to test grammatical knowledge.	B1-C2: syntactic parsing establishing propositional meaning at sentence level
Multiple choice Cloze	A text with 5 gaps each with 3 or 4 multiple choice options (3 at B1, 4 at B2 and above). The length of the text may range between 60 - 150 depending on the level.	This task is designed to test knowledge of lexis/lexico-grammar.	B1-C2: word recognition & lexical access syntactic parsing establishing propositional meaning at sentence level inferencing B2-C2: building a mental model
Cross Text Matching	Candidates read across four texts on the same topic in order to find the relevant information to match to prompts or questions. The combined length of all texts may range between 500 – 600 words.	This task is designed to test ability to read multiple sources to compare, contrast and synthesise information and views in different sources.	B2-C2: word recognition & lexical access syntactic parsing establishing propositional meaning at sentence level inferencing building a mental model C1-C2: creating a text level structure C2: creating an intertext representation
Discrete Cloze	A gapped sentence task with a single 3 or 4-option multiple-choice item.	This task is designed to test lexical and lexico-grammatical knowledge.	B2-C2 word recognition & lexical access syntactic parsing
Reading Discrete with a graphic	Candidates read a short text e.g. a notice or a message and answer a single 3-option multiple-choice question. Some contextual support is available for the presentation of texts including pro-forma templates such as email screens, post-it notes, telephone messages, other templates such as notices and labels, and a variety of fonts and text styles. No other visual support (e.g., an image) is included in the task.	The main testing aim of this task is for candidates to interpret language found in short texts (signs / notices / emails, etc.)	B1-B2 word recognition & lexical access syntactic parsing inferencing B2: building a mental model
Gapped Text, Sentences	Candidates read a long text with five gaps representing extracted sentences. Candidates match the extracted sentences to the gaps, selecting from a set of eight	This task is designed to test careful reading at a global level, testing the candidate's ability to	B1-C1: word recognition & lexical access syntactic parsing

	options, five of which are keys while three are distractors.	understand text structure, cohesion, and coherence.	establishing propositional meaning at sentence level inferencing B2-C1: building a mental model C1: creating a text level structure
Gapped Text, Paragraphs	Candidates read a text from which five sections have been removed and fill each gap by choosing the appropriate paragraph from six options 5 of which are keys while 1 is a distractor. The total text length of the text (i.e. base text plus the six paragraph options) may range between 600 - 700 words.	This task is designed to test understanding of cohesion, coherence, text structure and global meaning through reading at a careful global level.	B2-C2 word recognition & lexical access syntactic parsing establishing propositional meaning at sentence level inferencing building a mental model
Comprehension Task with 5 items	This is a reading comprehension text followed by five 3- or 4-option multiple choice questions. Texts may range between 300 - 600 words depending on level of difficulty.	This task is designed to test reading for gist and specific information such as opinion, purpose, main idea, implication.	B1-C2 word recognition & lexical access syntactic parsing establishing propositional meaning at sentence level inferencing B2-C2: building a mental model C1-C2: creating a text level representation
Comprehension Task with 2 items	This is a reading comprehension task but with a shorter text and just two 4-option multiple-choice questions. Texts may range between 200 - 250 words depending on level of difficulty.	To test reading for gist and specific information such as opinion, purpose, main idea, implication, etc.	B2-C2 word recognition & lexical access syntactic parsing establishing propositional meaning at sentence level inferencing building a mental model C1-C2: creating a text level representation

As can be seen in Table 1, tasks cover all the cognitive processes listed in the model, from word recognition up to intertextual representation. The majority of test takers are likely to be at B2-C1 level, and so the majority of tasks are designed to cover syntactic parsing, establishing propositional meaning at sentence level, inferencing, and building a mental model. Tasks are also designed to replicate scenarios and situations learners may experience, thus addressing the social aspect of the socio-cognitive model. Alongside cognitive validity addressed by the task types, at Cambridge we also consider criterion related validity, i.e. how well the tasks relate to concepts of language proficiency as illustrated in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020). In terms of criterion related validity, the following CEFR scales are used during the item writing process:

- Overall reading comprehension, B1-C2
- General linguistic range, B1-C2
- Vocabulary range, B1-C2
- Reading for information and argument, B1-C2
- Identifying cues and inferring, B1-C1
- Reading for orientation, C1-C2

A more detailed version of the reading model which the Linguaskill exam is based on, and the updated CEFR descriptors are both available as listed below.

Further Reading

Weir, C J and Khalifa, H (2008) A cognitive processing approach towards defining reading comprehension, Research Notes 31, 2–10.

Council of Europe. (2020). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing. Retrieved from www.coe.int/lang-cefr

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