Performance Testing As Benchmark For Lote Teacher Education

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1. Introduction

In addressing the question of LOTE teacher supply, the recently published Nicholas report (ACCLAME & NLLIA 1993) devotes considerable space to the question of teacher language proficiency. The report reveals that while there is widespread recognition of the need to ensure satisfactory language standards amongst LOTE teachers, there is little consistency amongst higher education institutions across Australia in terms of levels or competencies to be assessed or procedures and criteria for assessment. Proficiency prerequisites for language teachers are all too often defined quantitatively, in terms of 'seat time' or hours of formal study, rather than in relation to the particular skills required for effective professional performance, and it is sobering to read that about 40% of the trainee teachers surveyed in the Nicholas study regarded their tertiary language learning experiences as inadequate preparation for their role as language teachers. Their suggestions for improvement to language courses in higher education indicate the need for closer connections to be made between the language learning experience and the context of eventual use.

The issue of what constitutes adequate proficiency for the classroom and the problems associated with both defining and measuring the language skills of LOTE teachers are the subject of this paper. These issues are considered in the context of an Italian language proficiency testing project recently undertaken by the National Language and Literacy Institute's Language Testing Research Centre (LTRC) at the University of Melbourne.

The **Language Proficiency Test for Teachers: Italian** was developed with two major purposes in mind:

(i) as benchmark for teacher education

By making explicit the occupational language requirements of the foreign language teacher, this test serves to identify individual

strengths and weaknesses in order to assist teacher educators in setting goals for language instruction in the context of pre-service or in-service training courses.

(ii) to certify LOTE teachers

The test provides a means for determining whether those applying for employment as LOTE teachers in primary schools[1], including those who have studied outside Australia and/or native speakers whose language skills have been acquired "at the mother's knee" rather than through a process of formal study, are sufficiently proficient in the target language to perform their teaching duties effectively.

The choice of Italian was determined by the fact that in Australia this is the language most commonly taught at primary level in both state and independent schools. This meant that there would be a relatively large pool of teachers available to trial the test and, ultimately, to benefit from the information it provides. The fact that the test measures proficiency in this language rather than in another is in a sense unimportant given that the project was funded under the Australian Second Language Learning Programme (ASLLP) as a blueprint for similar tests in the range of languages taught in Australian schools. The LTRC has since received funding from the Innovative Languages Other than English scheme to adapt the Italian test format to Japanese.

2. Defining The Domain

The first step in the development of the test was that of domain definition. The research literature on classroom-based second language acquisition literature was consulted in order to

i) identify key features of 'teacher talk' which appear to contribute positively to classroom-based second language learning and

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[1]Although test tasks on the speaking component are oriented towards primary teachers, they have since been adapted for secondary teachers and have been trialled on representatives of this population.

ii) establish a framework for a subsequent job analysis.

2.1 Key aspects of 'teacher talk' in second/foreign language classrooms

Scrutiny of the SLA literature reveals that there are at least four aspects of language or language-related ability which can be regarded as central to the LOTE teacher role. These include:

(i) the ability to use the target language as medium and object of instruction

The monolingual principle of using the target language as both medium and object of classroom instruction is supported by such writers as Wilkins (1974), Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982), Swain (1982) and Ellis (1984). Arguments are based on two premises: that <u>amounts</u> of exposure to the target language are a key factor in determining levels of learner attainment and that <u>quality</u> of language input is the issue. Ellis (1984) for example proposes that what he terms "framework-oriented" interaction (ie. the language involved in setting up classroom procedures through which learning can take place) has the advantage of being more 'natural' than the artificial language imported into the classroom for pedagogical purposes.

The quality of language input is also evaluated in terms of the opportunities it provides for learner output. Swain (1985) contends that progress in classroom second language learning is directly related to amounts of learner production and Ellis (1984) claims that certain types of teacher communication are more conducive to such production than others. He proposes that "message-oriented" talk (ie. interaction focussing on the teaching of subject content that is part of the school curriculum) will be more likely to stimulate meaningful output from second language learners than "medium oriented" talk (ie. interaction aimed purely at teaching the target language). Likewise, "activity-oriented" interaction (aimed at achieving student behaviours resulting in some non-verbal product) offers opportunities for a wide range of learner-initiated speech acts.

On these grounds it seems reasonable to suggest that, while the second language teacher may choose to resort to the L1 in certain situations, the more classroom functions the teacher is <u>able</u> to perform in the target language the better. Some of these classroom functions will make very particular demands on language proficiency. For example, the use of the target language for procedural purposes will involve the teacher in issuing quite complex sets of directives and the teaching of curriculum content may require control of subject-specific discourse (eg. to describe mathematical and scientific processes).

<u>(ii) the ability to modify target language input in such a way as to render it comprehensible to learners</u>

There is evidence from a number of SLA studies that particular features of teacher-student talk differ from speech addressed to linguistically competent adults. Larsen-Freeman & Long (1991) characterize this talk as a 'regularized' version of the language whereby forms which constitute exceptions to general rules are avoided. Thus teacher speech usually contains a more restricted range of vocabulary (Arthur et al., 1980), greater prevalence of high frequency lexical items (Chaudron, 1983, 1987; Zobl, 1983), a lower incidence of idiomatic usage (Henzl, 1973, 1979) and a tendency towards shorter, syntactically simplified or propositionally less complex utterances (Gaies, 1977; Scarcella and Higa, 1981). Hatch (1983) also mentions high incidence of directives, frequent pauses, reduced rate of speech and clear articulation as being characteristic of teacher input in second language classrooms. These speech adjustments, which closely resemble those found in 'foreigner talk' generally, are claimed to be facilitative of learner comprehension and are considered by Krashen (1980, 1981, 1982) to be a *sine qua non* of learner intake. More recent evidence (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) suggests that modification of the <u>interactional structure</u> of conversation. (eg repetitions, topic fronting, paraphrase, decompositions, rhetorical signalling) by teachers in response to perceived learner needs may be even more crucial for second language acquisition than purely linguistic adjustments.

Attention to speed and clarity of articulation, to choice of lexis and to syntactical complexity, as well as a high degree of linguistic flexibility to enable reformulation, simplification or elaboration of discourse are thus of key importance for language teachers.

(iii)The ability to produce well-formed input for learners

A number of studies suggest a relationship between frequency of grammatical features occurring in teacher input and accuracy levels in subsequent learner production (Hatch, 1974; Lightbown, 1980; Larsen Freeman, 1976; Long, 1981). Pidginized production from second language learners, on the other hand, has been attributed to interaction with semi-proficient peers at the expense of exposure to native-like input from the teacher (Plann, 1977; Hammerly, 1987; Harley & Swain, 1978). Cathcart Strong (1986) points out that in foreign language classrooms teacher reformulations and expansions of learner interlanguage may be the only source of well-formed input available to learners and may thus be central to the acquisition process.

While the evidence from these studies is only tentative, it suggests that the teacher's role in modelling correct forms in the target language may be an important one. Correctness, moreover, is not restricted to grammatical accuracy. One aspect of 'well-formedness' which receives less attention in the literature is pronunciation. In the absence of other models of the target language, it is likely that the quality of the teacher's pronunciation will have a bearing on the intelligibility of learner speech (Suter, 1976).

(iv) the ability to draw learners' attention to the formal features of the target language

There is still uncertainty about the ways in which formal features of the target language are first rendered salient to learners and subsequently incorporated within their interlanguage system, and there are as yet relatively few studies which explore the impact of corrections on learner output (Chaudron, 1988). While it is generally agreed that positive grammatical evidence to learners is best provided in the form of naturally occurring samples of grammatical language, there are indications in the literature that explicit 'negative input' (ie. signalling that the learner's output deviates from native-speaker norms) can have a positive effect on the accuracy of learner production (eg. Schachter, 1983; Tomasello and Herron, 1989). Schachter (1986) points out that in foreign language classrooms the teacher may the only person equipped to provide this kind of feedback. The provision of such feedback has implications not only for teacher training in classroom

methodology, but also for teacher language proficiency. To talk about a foreign language in the foreign language, the teacher will require knowledge of metalinguistic terminology and command of particular language functions required to draw attention to rule violations and to provide explanations geared to the learner's level of understanding.

2.2 Job analysis

A further stage in the test development process was a job analysis. The purpose of this analysis was to identify the kinds of target language tasks performed by competent LOTE teachers in Australian classrooms. Four Italian programmes (3 primary and 1 junior secondary) were chosen as sites for observing foreign language teachers in action. The programmes were chosen to represent a range of approaches (partial-immersion, activity-based, grammar-based, thematic) and a range of grade levels. Each programme was well-established and involved experienced teachers who had been recommended for their high level of professionalism and for the fact that they conducted their lessons in the target language. The decision to observe and consult 'good' rather than randomly selected teachers was based on that fact that the use of Italian as the prime vehicle of classroom communication is not the norm in Australian classrooms (see for example Paciocco, 1991). For this reason the nature of teacher input provided for learners of Italian in the classroom is not always, if we believe what the literature has to tell us, conducive to second language development. It was felt that if the test were to be used as benchmark for professional training, it should offer a model of 'best practice' rather than simply reflect the status quo.

On the basis of observations of one or two lessons at each site and subsequent discussions with the 5 participating teachers, an inventory was compiled listing functions performed by the teacher in the target language (see Table 1 below). These behaviours have been grouped into categories based loosely on the goal-based framework of classroom interaction developed by Ellis (1984). which was referred to in the literature review above. The framework divides classroom talk into:

1. interaction oriented toward 'core' <u>pedagogic</u> goals

including: medium- oriented interaction

message-oriented interaction

activity-oriented interaction;

2. interaction which serves to create a <u>framework</u> within which teaching can take place.

Because our informants made reference to target language use which occurred outside the actual classroom, an <u>extra-classroom</u> use category was added.

	Macro skill
1.Interactions involving core (ie pedagogic) goals	
<u>**1.1 medium-oriented interactions**</u>	
(ie primary target is teaching of target language)	
1.1.1 modelling the target language	
* writing poems/songs/sentences/words/phrases for public display (blackboard/poster/noticeboard))	*Writing*
* reading out words/phrases from the board	*Reading/speaking*
giving dictation	*Reading/speaking*
* singing songs, reciting rhymes /poems	*Speaking*
performing role plays with a student	*Speaking*
1.1.2 providing information about the target language	
highlighting verb-endings/words/phrases on the blackboard	*Writing*
* pointing out errors /inappropriate usage	*Speaking/Writing*
writing comments on quality of work submitted.	*Writing*
* offering grammar explanations	*Speaking/Writing*
* explaining meanings of words/phrases /offering synonyms	*Speaking/Writing*
spelling out words/phrases	*Speaking*
conjugating verbs	*Speaking/Writing*

1.2 message-oriented interactions
(ie primary target is to teach content which is part of the school
   curriculum)
*   eg explaining processes (eg the life cycle of a
    butterfly, how electrical circuits function,
    how to multiply numbers, how food is digested)   *Speaking*
*   categorizing plants/animals/foods   *Speaking*
*   labelling pictures /diagrams
    eg parts of the body/animals etc   *Speaking/Writing*
*   presenting information about aspects of
    Italian culture   *Speaking*
*   telling/reading aloud stories   *Reading/speaking*
1.3 activity-oriented interactions
(ie primary target is to achieve student behaviours that result in
   some non-verbal product)
*   giving instructions for a game   *Speaking*
*   telling students how to make something
    (eg a model aeroplane)   *Speaking*

2. interaction involving framework goals   *Macro skill*
(ie prime goal is to set up organizational framework for the lesson
*   issuing directives (to individuals and whole class) about
    routine classroom business   *Speaking*
*   disciplining students (eg issuing warnings/indicating
    disapproval of inappropriate behaviour)   *Speaking*
*   explaining how to go about classroom tasks   *Speaking*
    explaining about homework requirements /timetable
    arrangements/
    book borrowing system/forthcoming excursion etc.   *Speaking*
*   asking questions of students to check on progress with classroom
    tasks/
    understanding of procedures   *Speaking*
    responding to students' questions/requests
    for clarification   *Speaking*
*   rephrasing (simplifying) explanations
    /instructions to assist comprehension   *Listening/Speaking*

3 Extra-classroom use of TL   *Macroskill*

<u>3.1 preparing for the lesson</u>

*   selecting suitable texts (taped or written) for classroom use
                                           Reading/listening

*   consulting dictionaries/encyclopaedias   *Reading/listening*

*   preparing handouts in Italian (eg. grammar explanations, vocabulary lists,
comprehension questions on a listening/reading passage, glossaries,
worksheets)   *Writing*

*   simplifying authentic texts by reducing them in length, simplifying vocabulary
and rephrasing complex structures   *Reading/Writing*

     translating texts (eg children's stories) from English *Writing*

     preparing written cue cards for role play activities   *Writing*

     transcribing a text from a tape or video recording   *Writing*

*   preparing signs/posters in Italian   *Writing*

<u>3.2 interacting with members of the school community</u>

     talking to individual students about their progress/difficulties
                                           Speaking

     talking to Italian parents about a child's progress   *Speaking*

     writing memos/circulars to Italian parents   *Writing*

     writing notices for school magazine.   *Writing*

<u>3.3 professional development</u>

*   reading books/articles from newspapers/ professional journals
in Italian   *Reading*

     listening to Italian radio programmes   *Listening*

     watching Italian videos/films   *Listening*

     listening to lectures by Italian visitors about
Italian language pedagogy/aspects
of Italian culture   *Listening*

     asking questions at professional development
seminars conducted in Italian   *Listening/Speaking*

Table 1. Inventory Of Teacher Tasks

The inventory makes no claims to be rigorous in its groupings (Ellis himself acknowledges the inevitable overlap between one category and another due to the fact that many speech acts performed by the teacher have multiple purposes) nor is it by any means exhaustive.

A much more extensive study would need to be undertaken to cover all the possible interactions performed by second language teachers and to establish the micro skills involved in each one. It can at best be regarded as partially indicative of the range of target language functions which the competent second language teacher in primary and junior secondary classrooms may be called upon to perform. What emerges most powerfully from this small survey (and this was supported by classroom observations) is the centrality of oral skills in teacher performance. The ability to read and write in Italian was nevertheless acknowledged by all informants as being of key importance to their role, both for the purpose of lesson preparation and as a means of maintaining contact with the target language culture.

3. Sampling From The Domain

Since this taxonomy is descriptive rather than hierarchical it is, as it stands, of limited use to the test developer. Clearly not all tasks can be included on the test and many of them are impossible to model in the test situation in the absence of the learner. A number of principles were established to guide the process of sampling from the domain. They were as follows:

* scope

It was decided that the test should include at least one task from each of Ellis' categories (1984) to ensure coverage of the target domain. All macro skills and a broad range of language functions were to be represented on the test.

* frequency of use

It was on the basis of this principle that a decision was made to give preference to tasks performed most frequently by the teachers observed (those marked with an asterisk on the inventory) and to give greater weighting to spoken discourse in the design of the test.

* importance

The teacher input literature reviewed earlier in this paper served as a basis for prioritizing particular aspects of teacher talk. Test tasks and assessment criteria were selected with these in mind.

The specifications drawn up for the test represent a trade-off between each of the above principles. Although all four skills are assessed in the pilot version of the test, this paper will focus on the speaking test only.

4. Test Design

A brief outline of tasks included in the pilot version of the speaking test is shown in Table 2 below.

Phase 1: Warm up (2 – 3 minutes)
Candidates engage in a brief "getting to know you" conversation with the interviewer.
    Target audience: interviewer
    Type of communication: "extra-classroom use"   Mode : Dialogue
    Functions: requesting/giving information/expressing opinions etc.

Phase 2: Reading aloud (preparation — 2 minutes; performance — 2 minutes)
The candidate reads aloud a short children's story as if to a group of children and then, at the request of the interviewer, explains in Italian the meaning of a selected words from the passage.
    Target audience: Whole class
    Type of communication: "message- oriented"   Mode: Monologue
    Functions: narrating, explaining, exemplifying

Phase 3: Story retelling (preparation — 1 minute; performance —3 minutes)
The candidate retells the same story, as if to a group of L2 learners,
    using a set of picture prompts in story book form.
    Target audience: whole class
    Type of communication: "message- oriented"   Mode: Monologue
    Functions: Narrating/describing

Phase 4 : Giving instructions (preparation — 1 minute; performance
—2 minutes)
Using a set of picture prompts the candidate explains as if to a
group of L2 learners how to undertake a simple construction
activity.
   Target audience: whole class
   Type of communication: "activity-oriented"   Mode: Monologue
   Functions: directing, explaining

Phase 5: Assigning and modelling a role play (3 minutes)
Using cue cards written in English the candidates explains details
of a role play situation to the interviewer (as he might to a student
in his class & assigns him/her a role. Candidate and interviewer
then act out the role play together.
   Target audience: individual student
   Type of communication: "framework-oriented" and "medium
   oriented"
   Mode: Dialogue
   Functions: directing, explaining, persuading, requesting
   information, complaining etc

Phase 6: Making a presentation on an aspect of Italian culture* (3
minutes)
Drawing on some brief Italian notes provided by the interviewer
the candidate makes a brief presentation on a culture related topic.
   Target audience: whole class
   Type of communication: "message oriented"   Mode: Monologue
   Functions: Explaining/informing

Phase 7: Explaining learner error* (4 minutes)
Using an authentic piece of student writing in Italian, and in
response to prompting from the interviewer the candidate explains,
as if to a second language learner, the nature of his/her mistakes.
Target audience: individual student
   Type of communication: "medium-oriented"   Mode: Dialogue
   Functions: explaining, eliciting information

Duration Of Test: 30 Minutes

Table 2. Italian Speaking Test: Pilot Version

For the sake of coverage, tasks have been sampled from the "medium-oriented", "message-oriented", "activity-oriented" and "framework-oriented" categories of communication. The entire test is conducted in Italian. Phase 2, the reading aloud task, provides raters with an opportunity to focus on pronunciation independently of other features of language proficiency and at the same time provides input for the subsequent story-telling task. Phase 3, the story-retelling task, serves to elicit narrative discourse and, more importantly, it involves the candidate in reformulating and elaborating the linguistic input provided in the original reading task. Phase 4, the instruction-giving task, focuses on the kind of concrete construction activity which is common in primary language classrooms and taps the ability to use context-dependent language which is rich in directives. Phase 5, the role play task, elicits "framework-oriented" input from the candidate and also provides opportunities for negotiated interaction. Phase 6, the culture-related presentation, invites "message-oriented" input on cultural topics which are typically covered in primary and secondary classrooms. In Phase 7, the error correction task, candidates are required to comment on a piece of student writing containing a number of common errors and thereby to demonstrate their metalinguistic abilities.

As is obvious from these abbreviated specifications, the candidate is required to assume the role of classroom language teacher from Phase 2 of the interview until the end. The most obvious limitation to task authenticity is the predominance of monologic discourse. The decision to limit the "interactiveness" of test tasks, in spite of the demonstrated importance of negotiated interaction to second language acquisition, was due to the fact that the examiners (there are two of them) could by no stretch of the imagination be taken to be equivalent to the teacher's target audience, and that is a group of primary school-age second language learners with limited understanding and control of the target language. The monologic tasks allow candidates, rather than the interviewers, to take control of the talk. The candidates in addressing their discourse to a hypothetical classroom audience are also saved the embarrassment of "talking down" to the examiners. With the exception of Phase 1 and 5 of the test, the interviewer's main role is to expedite procedures rather than to engage in conversational interaction with the candidate.

While the design of test tasks is intended to reflect in some measure the linguistic demands of the classroom environment, the assessment criteria draw attention to the features of language proficiency which the literature identifies as important for second language development. Assessment criteria are of two types. First, the linguistic criteria, which are applied task by task, assess pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, resources of expression, fluency and comprehension. Assessments for each of these categories are made at least once, and in most cases twice during the course of the interview. Descriptions of performance at six levels of ability are provided for each rating category. Classroom communicative competence criteria, on the other hand, invite judgements about the suitability of language strategies used by candidates in relation to the purpose of the communication. To assist with these assessments raters are provided with a list of questions to help them arrive at a decision such as "was the pausing, phrasing and pace of delivery appropriate for a classroom audience?" These classroom communicative competence assessments are made on three occasions during the interview and are measured on a defined four point scale. Also, towards the end of the test, a 'metalanguage' category is included to assess the adequacy of candidates' explanations of learner error.

At the end of the interview, assessors are asked to produce summative ratings for overall level of performance in relation to the requirements of teaching. It has thus been possible, in analysing test scores, to gauge the relative influence of the various assessment categories on assessors' overall judgements. The results of this analysis, which are reported in another paper (Elder, 1993a), reveal that candidates' performance on the classroom competence criteria, can in some measure compensate for gaps in their linguistic expertise. This is an important issue in considering what constitutes minimum proficiency for the classroom.

5. Expert Feedback

As part of the content validation process, feedback as to the relevance of test tasks and assessment criteria was sought from a group of 18 experienced Italian teachers/teacher educators. To assist them in making their assessment, the test performance of 50 trial candidates was videotaped and circulated amongst group

members, all of whom viewed a minimum of 10 tapes and rated them according to the specified criteria. The teachers/teacher educators were then asked to rate the appropriateness of each test task as a) a measure of language proficiency b) a measure of classroom communicative competence, and to provide extensive feedback both on the design of test tasks and on the wording of the performance descriptors. The results of this survey are summarized below.

TASK	Appropriate	Inappropriate
Phase 2A Story Reading	53%	47%
Phase 2B Story Retelling	100%	0%
Phase 3 Instruction Giving	100%	0%
Phase 4 Role play	86%	14%
Phase 5 Cultural Presentation	85%	15%
Phase 6 Error Correction	92%	8%

Table 3. Test tasks as a measure of language proficiency

TASK	Appropriate	Inappropriate
Phase 2A Story Reading	92%	8%
Phase 2B Story Retelling	100%	0%
Phase 3 Instruction Giving	100%	0%
Phase 4 Role play	92%	8%
Phase 5 Cultural Presentation	85%	15%
Phase 6 Error Correction	92%	8%

Table 3. Test Tasks As A Measure Of Classroom Competence

As can be seen from these responses, test tasks were perceived by the majority to be suitable measures of both language proficiency and classroom communicative competence. While some assessors felt that the "reading aloud" task was not a measure of <u>language</u>

proficiency as such, they felt that the inclusion of this task was legitimate given its relevance to the foreign language teacher's role. There were more reservations about the cultural presentation than any other phase of the test. One or two raters criticized the topics and/or input materials provided for this task, but the main objection was the difficulty of assessing language proficiency independently of the background knowledge required for successful performance of the task. Criticisms of the role play task were mainly directed towards the interviewer, who was seen to be "working too hard at the expense of candidates' control of the discourse flow". Interestingly, the assessors were unanimous in their support of the monologic story-retelling and instruction-giving tasks which suggests (as already intimated) that it may be easier to sustain the illusion of the candidate as teacher in the absence of interviewer input. However, some uneasiness about the authenticity of test tasks is reflected in suggestions for improvement made by a number of informants who called for more props (eg. blackboard and board marker, illustrative material) to enhance the 'teacherliness' of the test performance and more explicit instructions to candidates about the nature of the learner audience they are supposed to be addressing.

While the feedback from expert informants is on the whole encouraging in that it suggests that they perceive the test to be targeting relevant language skills, particular criticisms have been used as a basis for refining task design. For example, in response to concerns about candidates' limited contribution to the role play, we are experimenting with tasks involving two candidates, rather than candidate and examiner. It is anticipated that this will provide opportunities for the kinds of modified interaction which were identified in Section 2 as being of particular relevance to the teacher role. For the Japanese version of the test, we are contemplating the introduction of a video-mediated component which will "bring the classroom into the test" and thereby make it easier for candidates, some of whom will have had no prior exposure to Australian LOTE classrooms, to conceptualize the context of the test performance. Whether these changes will in fact enhance the quality of language produced by candidates is unclear, and ongoing research focusing on the nature of test discourse under a variety of performance conditions is being undertaken.

6. Results Of The Test Trials

The test has been trialled on over a hundred candidates including practising teachers, teacher trainees and second and third year undergraduates from a range of tertiary institutions where Italian is taught. About 12% of the trial population were native speakers born and educated in Italy, and a further 15% were foreign language learners whose Italian was acquired solely in instructional settings. The remainder of the sample were background speakers with varying degrees of exposure to Italian or a variety of Italian in the home situation. Results have been analysed using multifaceted Rasch techniques and the test satisfies internal validity requirements (Elder, 1993b). Rater reliability is on the whole high, and only those raters who show consistency in their assessments will be used for future test administrations. Questionnaire responses from those taking part in the trials have been positive and for the most part support the feedback from teacher experts about the validity of test tasks.

The test has been found to be pitched at an appropriate level for the trial population. The task on the speaking component which proved most difficult for trial candidates was, not surprisingly, the metalanguage task in which candidates are required to give explanations in Italian of common learner errors in a simple written text. Not surprisingly, the candidates who coped best with this task were those who had attended classes where Italian was the medium of instruction.The instruction-giving task was also difficult and revealed widespread uncertainty amongst test-takers about the use of imperative forms in Italian. Given the value of instructions in classroom teacher input it is important that opportunities be provided to practice these forms in the context of professional development courses.The roleplay task was relatively easy for test candidates although many were unable to use formal registers appropriately. The reading aloud task was the easiest, but many of the candidates stumbled over unfamiliar words and appeared to lack word attack strategies. The subsequent task, in which the examiner asks candidates to explain in Italian the meaning of selected words and phrases in the story caused problems for the majority of test candidates. Many were able to provide English meanings but lacked the linguistic flexibility required to produce synonyms or explanations in Italian. The story retelling task was performed adequately by most of the candidates, but what

distinguished the more proficient candidates from the others was the ability to interpret and rephrase the input provided in the original written text. More proficient candidates tended to use a greater variety of vocabulary and cohesive devices and to deal with abstractions such as the emotions experienced by the protagonists rather than simply chronicling the facts of the story. Background speakers, not surprisingly, outperformed foreign language learners in pronunciation, although examiners commented that the intonation of both groups showed marked interference from Australian English. Performance on both the "resources of grammar and expression" and "fluency" criteria varied considerably from task to task and from candidate to candidate. Hesitations were frequently caused by difficulties in word retrieval and most instances of self-repair were attempts to improve grammatical accuracy. Grammatical accuracy was in fact the most powerful predictor of overall proficiency ratings assigned to candidates. The salience of accuracy in raters' language proficiency judgements is common in oral proficiency testing (see for example Raffaldini, 1988; McNamara, 1990) and is usually an indication of raters' traditional attitudes towards language. While on a more general proficiency test it might be appropriate to question this emphasis on formal accuracy, it is arguably of particular importance for teachers given what was said in Section 2 about the relationship between "well-formedness" of teacher input and the quality of learner output.

7. Reporting

Four distinct levels of test performance were distinguished and these are reported under four different headings on a certificate provided for candidates(see below). Level 4, Advanced professional competence was only attained by a small number of candidates whose performance was in all respects native-like. It was considered that this level should ideally be a prerequisite for those teaching in immersion programmes where specialist subject content is taught in the target language. Level 3, Professional Competence was achieved by considerable numbers (but by no means all) of those who had undertaken a two or three year major study in Italian at tertiary level. Expert informants considered that attainment of such a level should be the prerequisite for employment or at least the target to which both trainee and practising teachers educated

outside Italy could realistically aspire. While some language upgrading was considered necessary for candidates who performed at Level 2, Minimum Professional Competence, it was conceded that in spite of their linguistic limitations, they would be able to meet some of the demands placed on teachers in LOTE classrooms. It was felt that if employment offers were made to teachers at this level they would need to be placed in programmes where they had support from more linguistically proficient colleagues and to be offered opportunities for concurrent language upgrading. Candidates at Level 1, Limited Professional Competence were considered to lack the requisite language skills and it was agreed that they would need further intensive language training before engaging in language teaching activities.

Certificate of Proficiency for Language Teachers: Italian

The University of Melbourne

Rosanna Bonfadini

This is to certify that the candidate named above sat for the

Proficiency Test for Language Teachers: Italian

and was assessed as follows:

LEVEL 3: Professional Competence

The candidate was deemed by the examiners to have achieved a satisfactory level of competence on the text-editing, reading, writing and listening sections of the test.

Performance on the speaking test was at the following level:

Linguistic ability:	Level 3
Classroom Competence:	Level 2

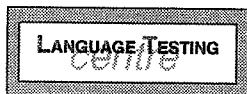Descriptions of typical performance at each level are given overleaf

Date of Examination   Place of Entry

October 1993   Melbourne

Test administrator: Catherine Elder

THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES AND LITERACY INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA

LANGUAGE TESTING Centre

Funded by the Australian Second Language Learning Programme

8. Implications Of The Project

Apart from the obvious practical value of the Language Proficiency Test for Teachers: Italian as a tool for identifying the language skills of Italian speakers in relation to professional practice, our approach to defining the domain of teacher language proficiency has important implications for the preparation of LOTE teachers generally. The literature review and task inventory presented in Section 2 of this paper offers a possible framework for teacher educators in designing a task-based language curriculum geared to producing skills and strategies amongst learners which are of direct relevance to their future role as language teachers. This job-specific orientation is appropriate for pre-service or in-service language upgrading courses for teachers, and could also form the basis of specialist study options for undergraduates who envisage a career in language teaching.

In the longer term, the development and implementation of a series of communicatively-oriented LOTE teacher proficiency tests similar to the one we have described is likely to generate positive washback on the teaching of languages generally, in that it may lead to wider recognition of the value of communicative ability as a legitimate goal of LOTE teaching. This is not to suggest that schools and higher education institutions should dedicate themselves solely to producing communicative competence amongst language learners. LOTE instruction also has a formative role and must aim to impart a substantive body of knowledge about the particular target language and the communities that use it. It is nevertheless important that speaking proficiency be accorded a higher priority than is customary in traditional academic courses in languages other than English and that activities undertaken in oral communication classes are not seen merely as an 'add-on' to the mainstream curriculum. It is also crucial that a substantial amount (if not all) of the academic input in undergraduate language courses be delivered in the target language so that those who are to become LOTE teachers have a range of models to draw upon when devising their own curriculum materials and are in turn able to provide a linguistically and culturally 'rich' environment for their learners.

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