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INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN LANGUAGE TESTING AND ASSESSMENT

SOCIAL MEANINGS IN GLOBAL-GLOCAL LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY EXAMS

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If we admit that capitalism is collapsing (functioning in a growth economy that’s destroying the earth), we might see a hint of hope in the development of local artefacts, produced in micro-economies, based on local self-sufficiency and fair-trade. Growth-oriented export/import economies are the dream of the past, the shock of the present and the nightmare of the future!

Letter by a reader in the New Internationalist (March 2009)

Viewing high-stakes language proficiency exams as ideological apparatuses involving processes that produce, reproduce or resist specific forms of knowledge and communication exchange, this chapter makes a case for ‘glocal’ language proficiency testing. In doing so, it considers the concerns linked with global or international [English] language testing in the context of the cultural politics of ‘strong’ (and ‘weak’) languages. However, the chapter moves beyond critique and claims that locally-controlled testing suites may serve as counter-hegemonic alternatives to the profit-driven global language testing industry. The pro-glocal language testing arguments – using the Greek national foreign language proficiency examination suite as a case study – are political, economic and also linguistic. Specifically, in glocal testing, attention is turned from the language itself to language users (taking into account their experiences, literacies and needs) and may well serve multilingual literacy.

Key words: International language testing, Language proficiency certification, Glocal testing, Multilingualism, Mediation, Literacy (literacies)

1. International English language testing as a ‘self-serving’ project

1.1 The (political) economy of English language proficiency tests

The worldwide English language testing enterprise has established itself as ‘a commercial condominium trading in a specific knowledge product, the standardised EFL proficiency test’, says Templer (2004), and it is true. International English language proficiency testing is indeed a profitable enterprise. For example, it is estimated that the revenues of the Educational Testing Service alone (an organisation which markets the well-known TOEFL and IELTS exams) range from 700 to 800 million dollars each fiscal year. Likewise, other big commercial testing firms or organisations control and wish to control further English proficiency exams, investing

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significantly into this project. The 1990s Corporate Plan of the British Council, for example, aimed “to secure a substantial share of agency markets for educational and cultural services overseas”, and to do so “on a full cost-recovery basis” (quoted in Pennycook, 1994: 157-8). Other goals included to promote “a wider knowledge of the English language abroad” and also “to increase the demand for British examinations in English as a foreign language” (ibid).

International proficiency testing is constantly seeking to expand in significant markets. During the last decade, Eastern Europe and South America were targeted, and still are, but the most recent grand acquisition is China. Yet, certificate-hungry markets like Greece are not ignored. The Greek market is sought after by a good number of English testing enterprises (about 15 international English language proficiency tests are ‘recognized’), and these often shape the needs of the social groups that they target. By this, I mean that the international testing industry does not just respond to social needs for testing and certification; it actually helps shape them. Therefore, well-established and well-respected international exam suites in Greece, for example, have helped generate and reinforce the need to certify young learners’ language proficiency even though certificates of this sort are useless to children who would be better off spending their valuable time on creative language play instead of spending it to prepare for standardized language tests. When children do sit for the exams and pass, Greek parents are convinced that the certificate they get is the proof they need to be reassured that their child is learning/has learnt English (cf. Pavlou, 2005). The more prestigious the brand of the certificate, the greater their conviction is –especially if the branding process exploits the name of a reputable English or American university and the credentials that it provides. Greek parents are proud to announce that their child has the ‘Cambridge University’, or the ‘Michigan University’ degree. And they are willing to pay more for these ‘international’ exams than for local alternatives, convinced as they are, as stakeholders elsewhere, that these are the “only efficient, scientific option[s] for an international assessment marketplace” (Templer, ibid), and participating in a ‘hegemonic consensus on the inevitability of it all’ (Mulderrig, 2003).

The exams under consideration are not in reality international, if we understand the term as it has been used in the last two centuries. They are actually, national products administered internationally. To label them international is to purposefully attribute to them the traits of entities that extend across or transcend national boundaries. But, internationalization should not go hand-in-hand with forfeiting the right to claim ownership over the language of testing or of

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2 For the ideological operations and effects of branding, see Mitsikopoulou (2008).

3 The various English language proficiency exam suites operating in Greece advertise that they offer a ‘ptychio’ [degree] rather than a certificate, intentionally blurring the difference between a university degree and a language certificate.

4 The term ‘international’ refers to an organization relating to, or involving two or more nations, (e.g. an international commission). It also means extending across or transcending national boundaries—(e.g. the international fame one has). Finally, as a noun, it refers to any of several socialist organizations of international scope formed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries—the first one was formed in London in 1864 as the International Workingmen's Association aiming to unite all workers for the purpose of achieving political power along the lines set down by Marx and Engels.
language tests in the language in question.\textsuperscript{5} As a matter of fact, for dominant languages like English, it is financially beneficial to sustain the construct that language is owned by its native speakers (cf. Prodromou, 2008).\textsuperscript{6} Thus, the naturalisation of the idea that the native speakers of a language have the exclusive prerogative to assess proficiency in their language is not innocent, nor are decisions of organizations such as ALTE (the Association of Language Testers in Europe) to offer membership only to country-specific testing organisations, which have developed exams for the language of their country.

International proficiency testing has grown so much in the last 50 years that it is worth the attention of international conglomerates which have their fair share in the commodification of the language teaching, learning and assessment, and the accompanying goods, such as textbook sets, testing paraphernalia, ELT multimedia and fee-paying services such as training or exam preparation courses (cf. Dendrinos, 1999; Pennycook, 1994). Language testing organisations spend millions on promoting, advertising, and on even bribing their prospective customers.\textsuperscript{7} No wonder McNamara (2002) stresses the need for critical analysis of ‘industrialised language testing’ and suggests that a thorough social critique of the language testing project be undertaken. In a similar vein, Templer (ibid) calls for a critical ethnography of the language testing industry which, since the late 90s, has raised concerns about its ethics.

Respected testing scholars like Spolsky (1995), Hamp-Lyons (1997 & 2000), Fulcher (1999), and Shohamy (2001a) have urged that the international testing community look into and abide by ethical practices. Actually, concern about ethical issues in testing led the International Language Testing Association to draw up a Code of Ethics – even though most of the ethical issues posed herein are rather limited to the testers themselves. That is, they do not really cover institutional policies and practices such as entrepreneurial tactics sometimes used by commercial testing, nor do they touch on specific procedures that may lead to corrupt practices, such as not making a clear line of distinction between the educational institution that prepares prospective test-takers for a specific exam and the institution that administers that exam.

\textit{1.2 Tests as ideological apparatuses}

Undoubtedly, international proficiency language testing has a tradition for tools that measure with psychometric accuracy and precision forms of knowledge. Test validity and reliability of assessment is hardly ever questioned by the general public, and any questions, posed by testing specialists, serve the purpose of improving the quality of the English language proficiency test tasks, the content of which is often chosen on the basis of validity criteria, rather than what form of knowledge is most appropriate and/or desirable in a given social context.

\textsuperscript{5} For discussion on this issue, see Widdowson (1994).
\textsuperscript{6} For further discussion regarding the ownership of language by native speakers, see Higgins (2003).
\textsuperscript{7} In Greece, one commercial English testing firm in particular offers (through mobile phone messages) a price per candidate head to private-tuition language school owners who can guarantee a group of at least 15 candidates for each exam administration. It also offers public and private language school teachers who can bring in candidate customers for their English exams special package deals such as trips abroad.
The content of international testing is not questioned either, with regard to whether or to how well it responds to the experiences, literacies and needs of local stakeholders. Nor is it read critically for its ideological underpinnings, even though it is without doubt that tests are not value-free or ideology-free products, and exam systems are apparatuses involving processes of ideologisation –just as the discursive practices in the texts of language textbooks do (Dendrinos, 1992), and just as language teaching practices do. “You may be sobered, as I was” asserts Holliday (2005: 45) “by the fact that in your everyday teaching, “small culture formation is in many ways a factory for the production of ideology”. Texts and images used in tests carry ideological meanings, while the choice of subject matter and text type, as well as the linguistic choices in texts construe worlds and realities for the test taker. Balourdi (2012),8 who critically analyses the reading comprehension texts of three proficiency exams (two international ones and the Greek national foreign language exams), makes a data-based argument illustrating this. The world portrayed in one of them –an American proficiency exam– linguistically constructs a market-orientated world –one in which advertising has a central role. Specifically, upon very detailed systemic functional linguistic analysis of a rather sizeable corpus of texts, Balourdi finds that there is consistent use of linguistic patterns which serve as typical features of advertising discourse and which position the implied reader as a potential consumer. Linguistic patterns also serve the foregrounding of the supplier-customer relationship, with money having a key role in their relationship.

By contrast, the reading comprehension texts in the second, an English proficiency exam, construes quite a different world—a world of inner experience inhabited by British subjects. This becomes apparent as Balourdi finds that lexicogrammatical choices favour behavioural processes, indicating states of consciousness and mental activity, but also relational attributive processes, assigning text participants strong feelings and emotions. It is a world of subjects who are mainly preoccupied with their personal and professional life, who make persistent attempts to prove themselves, to achieve personal goals and fulfill their ambitions through hard work and the use of their creative skills. Work and travel, which are among their prime interests, are consistently construed as opportunities for the participants to gain social recognition, fame, and success.

1.3 Testing for symbolic profit
Having discussed the commercial aspect of international proficiency testing in some detail, it is important not to shift attention from the fact that the material turnover from the exams is not the only reward for the testing organizations. In fact, I should like to suggest that the symbolic gain is just as crucial as the material profit.

International language proficiency testing has several self-serving goals, including that of sustaining the position of the national language it is built to market and the culture in which the language is immersed. In other words, it is substantially involved in the larger politics of the

8 Amalia Balourdi is a PhD student, working under my supervision, at the Faculty of English Studies of the University of Athens, who has just submitted her thesis, entitled World Representations in Language Exam Batteries: Critical Discourse Analysis of texts Used to Test Reading Comprehension.
internationalisation of language, so that it is easily exported around the world both as a service and as a marketable product (cf. Pennycook, 1994: 157). To this end, not only are the implications of the spread of a dominant language neutralised and denigrated, but also language itself is portrayed as culturally and ideologically neutral (cf. Dendrinos, 2001; 2002).

Interestingly, the theory of language at the heart of international proficiency testing is that language is a structural system cut off from ideological inscriptions and disconnected from its cultural context. Such a construal is serviced best by a structural view of language, a theory of language as an abstract meaning system which can be learnt and used irrespective of its contextual use. This theory is materialised in test tasks and items commonly focusing on lexical and sentence level meaning, as well as in the assessment criteria for oral and written production, which favour accuracy over appropriacy. It is also materialised in projects such as the ‘Cambridge English Profile’, which investigates candidates’ scripts by focusing on the formal properties of language.

1.4 International proficiency testing as a monolingual project

The final point to be made with regard to international proficiency testing is that it is by default a monolingual project. It does not involve adjustments to the cultural, linguistic or other needs of particular domestic markets because this would mean that the same product could not be sold in different cultures. It would need to be adjusted and involve more than one language, which would complicate matters from a financial point of view.

Therefore, all international language proficiency tests (paper-based and adaptive e-tests) are monolingual, as are diagnostic tests and self-assessment tests increasingly available, especially for the ‘big’ languages. Shohamy (2011: 418), who argues that “all assessment policies and practices are based on monolingual constructs whereby test-takers are expected to demonstrate their language proficiency in one language at a time”, claims that these assessment approaches view language as “a closed and finite system that does not enable other languages to ‘smuggle in’.” And this is true for both international proficiency language testing and for national language tests in schools and universities. They are monolingual both as examination suites (i.e., they are intended to test a single language) and as assessment systems (i.e., they are constructed to measure monolingual competence). Test papers endorse the idea that effective communication is monolingual (Dendrinos, 2010a) and that proficient users of a language do not

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9 The Cambridge English Profile is a project whose goal is to add specific grammatical and lexical details of English to the functional characterization of the CEFR levels, based on the Cambridge Learner Corpus, which contains exam scripts written by learners around the world (Hawkins & Buttery, 2010).

10 In Shohamy’s 2011 paper, from which she is quoted, we understand that her real concern is with national language testing for immigrants and their unfair treatment by the educational system which obliges them to take monolingual tests, despite the fact that they are bi- or multi-lingual speakers “who rarely reach language proficiency in each of the languages that is identical to that of their monolingual counterparts” (ibid). Yet, she continues, they are “always being compared to them and thus receive lower scores. Consequently, they are penalized for their multilingual competencies, sending a message that multilingual knowledge is a liability.”
use ‘hybrid’ forms, mix languages or codes. As has been discussed elsewhere (Dendrinos, 2010b), commercial English language testing and teaching continue to be a monolingual venture. This monolingualism “is in stark contrast to the current understanding of multilingual competencies for which various languages and aspects ‘bleed’ into one another in creative ways” says Shohamy (ibid), who critiques “current monolingual assessment approaches within a political and social context.” Interestingly, her statement makes us think that there is a multilingual trend in language and language education policies worldwide. Unfortunately, however, this is not so. Current language policies in the U.S. and in other economically powerful countries are –sadly– predominantly monolingual. Within the European Union, however, the promotion of multilingualism has been a consistent endeavour over the last 10 or 15 years. However, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR 2001: 4), it has not yet “been translated into action in either language education or language testing”. International proficiency testing is not only intent on measuring the test-taker’s linguistic competence in a single language, but on measuring it against the ‘ideal native speaker’. The political and economic dimensions of language teaching, particularly English language teaching, based on the native-speaker paradigm have been discussed by various scholars (Dendrinos 1998, 1999; Phillipson, 1992, Pennycook, 1994). What has not been widely discussed is the motive behind proficiency testing targeting linguistic competence that resembles that of the native speaker. I do think that there is additional motive for testing to aim specifically at linguistic competence and that is simply that it is easily measurable through objective test items. Accurate measurement of communicative or sociolinguistic competence would involve test items and tasks that would take into consideration the social and cultural awareness of specific groups of test takers –a requirement that international proficiency testing simply cannot meet.

2. Alternatives to international language proficiency testing
Concerned about the cost of language proficiency testing organisations such as TOEFL and IELTS which, in effect, have become “an EFL testing condominium or cartel”, Templer, (ibid) suggests several alternatives such as in-house testing, low-cost computer-based placement tests, ‘democratic’ international exams with hands-on local involvement to reduce exam fees, and learner-directed assessment with the use of tools such as language portfolios. He also considers an idea discussed by Bérubé (2003, in Templer, ibid), which is to assign ‘testing handicaps’ to different groups of candidates depending on their social background. He also proposes low-cost local variants, such as the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) –an exam developed with exclusive local control in SE Asia – developed in Malaysia, also recognised in Singapore. However, in suggesting these alternatives, Templer is thinking more of language testing that may or may not secure a candidate’s position into university. In fact, he is concerned about the

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11 In the context of the work carried out for the ‘Cambridge English Profile’, the lexical and grammatical features of the foreign language learners’ language production are measured against native speaker production. As Hawkins & Buttery (2010: p. 3 out of 23) assert, they are defined ‘in terms of the linguistic properties of the L2, as used by native speakers that have either been correctly, or incorrectly, attained at a given level’.
cost of university language entrance tests, which may prevent lower income students’ access to academia. In considering this issue, he also brings into the discussion the fact that scores on tests such as TOEFL and IELTS “have assumed a prime classificatory (and disciplinary) function”.

2.1 ‘Glocal’ alternatives to the international language proficiency testing industry

Concentrating on regional variants for language proficiency testing leading to certification, which is required for employment or admittance into university programmes and which counts as ‘cultural capital’ for the beholder, this chapter focuses on what I have been calling glocal (global + local) language proficiency testing12 (Dendrinos, 2004).

Glocalisation involves locally operated schemes, set up to serve domestic social conditions and needs, which are informed by international research and assessment practices. The most obvious benefit of glocal exam suites is that they are low cost alternatives to profit-driven industrialised testing. The less obvious advantage, but perhaps more important, is their socially interested control over forms of knowledge and literacy. Therefore, I should like to suggest that they would constitute a counter-hegemonic option with respect to the acquisition of knowledge – perhaps conducive to socio-political aspirations for democratic citizenry.

A case in point is the Greek National Certificate of Language Proficiency, known by its Greek acronym KPG (ΚΠΓ) – a language exam suite that is comparable to other non-commercial, state-supported testing systems, such as the French and the Finnish language proficiency exams.13 The basic link between them is that none of the three are profit-driven commercial exams as they are, all three of them, controlled by public service organisations. The French exam, however, is intended to test a single language. Operated by the Centre international d’étude pédagogiques, under the aegis of the French Ministry of Education, it has been developed to test proficiency in French as a foreign language and it is mainly for students of French outside of France. The symbolic profit, justifying the investment of state funds, is not unrelated to cultural politics of

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12 In a recent talk Pennycook (2010a) gave, he argued for the need to rethink the relation between the global and local because “the two terms sit in a very complex relation to each other” and “this relation is not helped by terminology such as ‘glocal’, since this simply elides the two ideas”. I think this may be true in some cases, but not in others. Actually, in his talk, Pennycook did not propose an alternative term. I believe it is rather difficult to find an all-encompassing notion/term representing all the different social practices and systems which may abide by global construals while focusing on the local. However, some of the points he made in his talk are worth thinking about, including that we consider a model that equates homogeny with the global and heterogeny with the local (a point I am not sure I agree with) and that we undertake a thorough exploration not only of globalization but also of localization (and relocalization in relation to recontextualization and resemioticization), so that the two terms may (in Pennycook’s words) ‘capture the dynamic of change’. This issue is also discussed in a book he published that year (cf. Pennycook, 2010b)

13 Though there are a few similarities between the French and the Finnish exams, the Finnish National Certificate of Language Proficiency is significantly different in that it is set up for several languages as second or foreign languages in Finland. Its tests are intended for adults, and they are developed jointly by the National Board of Education and the University of Jyväskylä. Much like the French and other European exam batteries, test tasks measure reading, listening, writing and speaking skills, on the six-level scale, in line with European models.
French language promotionism. In a marketised discourse, the official website advertises the DILF/DELF/DALF exams and claims that certification on the basis of these exams allows one ‘to opt out of a French university’s language entrance exam’ and that ‘having one of these French certifications looks good on your CV’.

The French exam, which is similar to other national exams for the certification of proficiency in their languages as foreign languages, such as the English, German and Italian, are very dissimilar to the Greek and Finnish national language exams because the latter two are multilingual suites. They are intended to test proficiency in several languages as these are used at home and abroad. Both these suites have been built taking into account domestic needs related to the languages they include.

The Finnish exam includes tests in Finnish as a foreign language, not as a product to be exported, but as a service to those who apply for citizenship and need to have their language proficiency certified.14 The Finnish exam suite includes other languages, which are significant in Finland, even if they bring no profit. Swedish is offered because it is the second official language and Saami because it is an important, indigenous language in Finland. Finally, low-cost exams are also offered in English, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish.

Likewise, the Greek exams are offered in languages, which are important for Greece. Besides English, French, German and Italian, which are the most widely taught and learnt languages in the country, KPG offers exams in Spanish (a polycentric language of growing popularity in Greece), and Turkish (the language of one of Greece’s major neighbours and the only other language which has been recognised as a minority language in one area of Northern Greece). The next language exam to be developed is for Russian, a language spoken by many who immigrate to Greece from Eastern Europe. Certification in Russian would provide these immigrants with one additional qualification that might secure them a job.

There are, of course, differences also between the Finnish and the Greek exam suites. Two of the essential ones are KPG’s view of language not as a structural but as a semiotic system and the special support of the exam suite to multilingualism, not only through the assessment system itself, but also because it is the first such exam battery to legitimate language blending as part of the testing procedure.

### 2.2 Characteristics of the KPG glocal language proficiency exam suite

#### 2.2.1 An overview

The KPG exam suite, governed by the Greek Ministry of Education, was instituted by law in 1999 and became operational in 2002. In 2003, it launched exams in the four most widely taught languages in Greece: English, French, German and Italian. From the very start, the exams used the CEFR as a springboard for content specifications and the KPG adopted the six-level scale of the Council of Europe for certification purposes. Test paper development and research related to

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14 There is also a Greek as a foreign language exam, but it is not a component of the KPG exam suite. The ‘Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in Greek’, is developed and administered by the Centre of the Greek Language, also under the aegis of the Greek Ministry of Education.
test validity and assessment reliability are the responsibility of foreign language and literature departments in two major universities in Greece.

The language exams in pen-and-paper form, presently offered twice a year,\(^{15}\) are administered by the Greek Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs ensuring exam confidentiality and venue security by using the support mechanism it is equipped with so as to carry out the national university-entrance exams. Test paper content must be approved by the Central Examination Board (henceforth CEB) before being disseminated, through a V.B.I. (vertical blanking interval) system, to state- selected examination centres throughout the country. The administration of the exams is directed and regulated by the CEB, which is appointed by Ministerial decree. Consisting of university professors who are experts in the foreign language teaching and testing field, the CEB is also responsible for specifications regarding exam format and structure, as well as scoring regulations. The CEB also functions in an expert consulting capacity, advising the Ministry on matters regarding the development and growth of the system, exam policies and law amendments, new and revised regulations.

The A (Basic User) level exam was developed upon popular demand for young candidates –as a preparatory step to higher-level exams. It should perhaps be noted here that the format of the KPG exams is more or less the same for all exam levels and all languages. As a need has been noted for an adult A-level certificate, there are plans to launch such an exam in the future –not necessarily in all KPG languages. The large percentage of candidates sitting for the B-level (Autonomous User) and C-level (Proficient User) exams in English are teenagers and young adults, but the picture is different for other languages. For example, in Italian and Turkish even the A-level candidates are adults.

2.2.2 A low-cost alternative

The KPG exams, initially funded by the state, are indeed an economical alternative to commercial testing. Unlike international proficiency testing with its overpriced fees, the KPG Board is concerned about how to make the exams as affordable as possible to the average Greek candidate. So, apart from the fact that testing fees are about half the price of commercial international exams, it was recently decided to develop and administer graded, intergraded paper-based exams with which a candidate pays a single exam fee, sits for one exam, but may be certified in one of two levels of proficiency. Each test paper includes tasks for two levels of language proficiency (A1+A2, B1+B2 and soon C1+C2) and candidates have a double shot for a certificate –for either the higher or the lower of the two scales, depending on the level of their performance.

There are a series of other KPG tactical moves aiming at implementing a ‘people’s economy

\(^{15}\) Presently, only a paper-based version of the KPG exams is offered, but an e-version is being developed and the goal is, in 2013, to launch computer adaptive tests in the six KPG languages in five examination centres throughout the country, equipped to facilitate special needs candidates to a greater degree than pen-and-paper centres do now. The e-tests will not replace the paper-based exams but the two options will be offered to cater for candidates who are computer literate and those who have little computer savvy.
One of them is the policy not to assign a numerical score to the successful candidate, whose proficiency is identified by the highest certificate s/he has obtained. Therefore, the issue of score expiration does not arise, as it does for some commercial English proficiency exams which stipulate that scores are valid for two years (so that after that the tests have to be taken and paid for all over again). A second tactical move is to set up examination centres not only in big cities, but also in towns and on the islands, so that candidates do not have to bear the additional cost of travelling to the bigger cities as they have to do for international exams. In case it becomes too expensive to send non-local examiners to conduct the speaking test, it is currently carried out through videoconferencing, as the Ministry of Education has a direct connection with each of the exam centres all over Greece.

Law and KPG regulations stipulate that only public schools be used as official exam centres that these centres be under the control of local educational authorities, and that the exam committees, the secretarial assistants and the invigilators are, all of them, educators working for the public school system which makes them more accountable for security measures.

Concern about both providing a low-cost alternative to candidates and contributing to the sustainability of the system has not led to measures, which could jeopardise the validity and reliability of the exams. Therefore, the KPG has not resorted to the cost-saving solution that most international proficiency tests opt for, i.e., having a single examiner to conduct the speaking test. To ensure fair marking, KPG law and regulations require that oral performance be assessed and marked by two examiners, who must be both present in the room where the speaking test is being carried out. As such, a large number of trained examiners are sent to exam centres all over the country to conduct the speaking test on the same weekend that the rest of the test papers are administered, though it is a rather costly solution, which most international exams do not prefer. Even though the option of finishing off in one weekend is ultimately to the candidate’s benefit, the decision was made for the sake of confidentiality. That is to say, when a speaking test is administered over the period of say one month, there is always a danger of the test tasks ‘leaking’ and this would be a serious drawback for a national exam.

Moreover, at each exam period, trained observers are sent out to different selected centres, not only to monitor the speaking test procedure, but also to assess examiners’ conduct during the test, their understanding of the evaluation criteria and the marking reliability (Delieza, 2011; Karavas, 2008; Karavas and Delieza, 2009). Despite the cost, the observation system is systematically implemented throughout the country, aimed at ensuring marking reliability and inter-rater agreement.

Special concern with fair marking has led to the KPG using two of its trained script raters to mark each candidate’s script, as well as script-rater ‘coordinators’ (one for every group of 20) who function both as directors and facilitators during the script assessment and marking process.

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16 The term is borrowed from Ransom & Baird, (2009).
17 Most international, commercial proficiency tests conduct their speaking test in Greece over a much longer period of time, with far fewer examiners.
18 See also a shorter article at: http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/kpg/kpgcorner_march2010.htm
19 The Handbook can be downloaded from http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/kpg/handbook_speaking.htm
This means that each script is blindly marked by two raters. If the Script Rating secretariat discovers that there is greater rater disagreement than the system allows, a special screening process is used.

2.2.3 An ‘egalitarian’ alternative
As was already mentioned, glocal multilingual language testing suites, such as those that we find in Greece and Finland, have as one of their main purposes to cater for the linguistic needs of the domestic job and education markets, as well as for other regional social demands. This is quite a valuable function given that the ‘weak’ languages – those of the economically and/or politically disadvantaged countries – are excluded from the commercial testing industry. They do not have shares in the condominium of international testing, built by dominant languages and, especially, English.

Expanding on the point above, it is important to understand that the languages of economically underprivileged societies and countries, which have limited international political power are not exportable products or domestic commodities. Therefore, investment in the development of a language proficiency exam for foreigners or for domestic use – even if it were possible – does not seem worthwhile. This is why perhaps none of the Balkan countries, for example, has developed their own language proficiency certification system, nor are there any big commercial enterprise taking interest in developing exams to certify proficiency in, say, Albanian or Bulgarian. It is obvious, in other words, that certification of language proficiency is tightly linked to language dominance and economic affluence. And this, in turn, has an important bearing on the status of a language, while it also has significant impact on the social position of its speakers within society and on their employment rights.

If proficiency in a language cannot be certified, the language itself does not count as qualification for employment or promotion in the workplace in Greece and elsewhere. Given that proficiency in ‘weaker’ languages often has no way of being certified, the KPG suite with its multilingual policy hopes to include some of these languages which are important for the Greek society and, in doing so, to develop psychometrically valid and reliable language measurement tools for them as well.

As a matter of fact, not only ‘weak’ but also ‘strong’ European languages (if strength is counted by numbers of speakers in the world) are not easily admitted into the international testing regime with its well advanced measurement tools and procedures, while even dominant languages are also lagging behind English, which is definitely the front runner in the race – and a testing race it is. In other words, it seems that the dominion of language proficiency testing is as powerful as the language which it tests. Therefore, language proficiency tests for different languages do not have the same prestige and it is the case that they are not of the same quality. Proficiency certificates for some languages may count for something or other, but according to popular belief they do not count as significant cultural capital.

Inequity in the quality of testing – at least in psychometric terms – may perpetuate to a certain extent the inequality between language proficiency certificates and between languages per se. After all, tests have been viewed not only as tools for measuring levels of language competence
but also as “tools for manipulating language” and for “determining the prestige and status of languages” (Shohamy, 2006).

Glocal testing uses the knowledge and responds to standards developed through international proficiency testing (Dendrinos, 2005). It uses this knowledge for the development of exams in languages where expertise is lacking. Moreover, if the glocal testing suite is multilingual, this means that it includes several languages and all of them are treated equally, in the sense that the specifications, the tools, the assessment criteria and all other products created and procedures followed are the same for all languages.

A final point to be made presently is that glocal multilingual exam suites abide by a single code of ethics for all their languages. This code is itself a glocal artefact in the sense that it follows the models proposed by International Language Testing Association and Association of Language Testers in Europe but makes adjustments and alterations. Actually, it is Karavas (2011) who convincingly argues that it is necessary to localise the ethical codes of proficiency testing in particular and proceeds to present the KPG Code of Ethical Practices, explaining how the KPG exams adhere to principles of accountability, professionalism and transparency and makes attempts to follow ‘democratic’ principles (cf. Shohamy, 2001b).

### 2.2.4 Socially sensitive ideological underpinnings

Balourdi (2012) has provided ample linguistic evidence to support the claim that there are ideological inscriptions in test texts that linguistically construe different realities. The American test texts, for example, are inhabited by Americans, who are involved either in organized leisure-time activities (which combine entertainment with the exploration of the history, culture and the ‘classical’ American values, brought forth by famous American old stars and performers) or in a commercial world where profit is the main goal of life. By sharp contrast, the thesis findings clearly show that texts in the KPG exams:

…linguistically construe a world that has special concern for environmental, health and social issues. The social participants inhabiting the texts are ‘world citizens’ [not British or American], with a more or less equal distribution of power. These are the main Actors, Seners, Sayers, and Possessors in material, mental, verbal, and possessive processes in the texts, where non-human actants exist but which are dominated by human actants that are socially active citizens, activists, eco-tourists, experts on different matters and authorial figures. The text participants are members of national and international social groups, interested in environmentally friendly practices, public hygiene, health and diet, and matters of greater social interest, or knowledgeable, creative social subjects, aware of what is going on around them.

And the writer continues to point out that KPG texts are commonly realized through third person narratives and the linguistic choices made indicate concern with objective ‘facts’, related to the reader by the writer, who is positioned as an expert and adviser. Given that test texts actually address candidates, it is interesting, Balourdi (ibid) says that the text writer is construed as someone who has better access to the truth and consequently good knowledge of what has to be done. The reader, on the other hand, appears to be in need of valid information, advice and guidance – which obviously educational institution is supposed to be able to provide.
The aforementioned and other findings from the same thesis discussed earlier in this chapter demonstrate in the clearest way that there are ideological meanings in all texts. However, where language teaching and testing is concerned with an impact on young people, the important question raised is who should have control over the linguistic construction of reality.

2.3 Glocalised proficiency testing, language education and literacy

While glocal tests take into consideration international research findings and abide by supranational structures such as the CEFR, they make decisions regarding the test papers, which are meaningful for the specific society for which they are developed. Test developers in a glocal system know (through intuition and relevant research) candidates’ cultural experiences, areas of lifeworld knowledge, types of literacies and social needs. Inevitably, they take all this into account when making decisions regarding test form and content, given that there is central concern about the types of competences, skills and strategies the groups of language learners they address need to develop. In other words, one of the most important characteristics of glocal testing, the KPG exams in particular, is that attention is relocated: from the language itself (as an abstract meaning system) to the user (as a meaning-maker).

Consideration of the Greek foreign language user is what makes the KPG test papers different from the test papers of the well-known international exams in several ways. For example, there is considerable attention to assessing candidates’ ‘language awareness’. Actually, among the several different types of tasks included in the KPG exams, from B1 level onwards, are those whose purpose is to test language awareness regarding contextually appropriate use of lexicogrammar. The language awareness component, at the level of discourse, genre and text is included in the reading comprehension test paper of the KPG exam. The correct response requires candidates’ awareness of which language choice is appropriate in each case, given the linguistic or discursive context.

Meaning is context specific, in the theory of language that the KPG has adopted. However, KPG reading and listening comprehension test papers concentrate less on local meanings, with reference to lexical items and structural patterns, and more on discourse meanings – both at lower and higher levels of language proficiency. Furthermore, KPG reading and listening comprehension papers test the understanding of meanings, as these are semiotically generated in texts of different genres through verbal, visual and aural modes of production.

The genre-based approach that the KPG exam suite has adopted is particularly evident in the writing test paper. As a matter of fact, the higher the level of the candidate’s language proficiency, the more s/he is expected to have developed language awareness regarding language choices required so as to produce discourse and genre sensitive language. The genre-based

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20 Language awareness is defined in the KPG exam suite as a more or less conscious understanding of how language operates, in different linguistic, situational and discursive contexts. For an extensive discussion on the types of language awareness see Little, 1997.
approach to writing is also clearly discernible in the assessment criteria for the marking of scripts.\textsuperscript{21}

There are many more distinctive characteristics in the KPG exams and readers may be interested in seeing these unique characteristics in the test papers themselves.\textsuperscript{22} Presently, however, we should turn attention and briefly discuss one of the most unique features of the KPG exams in the next subsection.

\textbf{2.4 Favouring the multilingual paradigm}

The European vision for a multilingual supranational state has been articulated most recently by the European Commission’s Civil Society Platform to promote multilingualism (Action Plan for 2014-20) and has had relevant support over the past decade or so with the production of practical guidelines, manuals and funded projects to facilitate a shift from monolingualism to multilingualism in language teaching and learning. The CEFR, a vehicle for language teaching, learning and assessment in a comparable manner, has been a step in this direction. But the road is still long. To quote the CEFR (2001: 4) itself:

\begin{quote}
... the aim of language education [should be] profoundly modified. It [should] no longer be seen as simply to achieve ‘mastery’ of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the ‘ideal native speaker’ as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim should be to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place. This implies, of course, that the languages offered in educational institutions should be diversified and students given the opportunity to develop a plurilingual competence.
\end{quote}

In an effort to fulfil this goal but also because of KPG’s approach to language use and the theory of language by which it abides, there has been an attempt from the very beginning to make the shift from a monolingual to a multilingual paradigm. The latter has its basis on a view of the languages and cultures that people experience in their immediate and wider environment not as compartmentalized but as meaning-making, semiotic systems, interrelated to one another. Such a view is, according to Shohamy (2011: 418), manifested in code switching and in the simultaneous use of different language functions (e.g. reading in one and speaking in another in the process of academic functioning). In this paradigm, people learn to make maximum use of all their semiotic resources so as to communicate effectively in situational contexts, which are often bi-, tri- and multi-lingual. In such settings, people use code switching and ‘translanguaging’ techniques, drawing upon the resources they have from a variety of contexts and languages. They use different forms of expression in multimodal texts to create socially situated meanings. Often they also resort to intra- and inter-linguistic as well as intercultural mediation.

It is this rationale that led the KPG suite, from the start, to incorporate intra- and inter-linguistic mediation tasks as an exam component in both the writing and the speaking tests from

\textsuperscript{21} Readers interested in the assessment criteria and marking grids, may visit the KPG site for the exam in English at http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/kpg/script_train.htm

\textsuperscript{22} Past papers, in English, are available –free of charge at http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/kpg/past_papers.htm

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B1 level. Mediation as an activity to be taught and tested was legitimated when included in the CEFR in 2001, but it is understood somewhat differently by the KPG than in the CEFR. Whereas in the latter it is understood as very similar to translation and interpretation, the KPG makes a clear distinction between mediation and translation/interpretation (Dendrinos 2006), and defines intralinguistic mediation as a process whereby information is extracted from a source text and relaying it in a target text of a different social variety, register, code. For example, the candidate is provided with a pie chart showing, for example, what percentages of people read which types of books and s/he is asked to write a report or a news article on this subject. Another example may be to ask the candidate to read a proverb and explain to the examiner who assumes the role of a child what the proverb means.23

Interlinguistic mediation, on the other hand, involves two languages. It is defined by the KPG as a process whereby information is extracted from a source text in L1 (in this case Greek which is considered to be the candidates’ common language) and relaying it in the target language for a given communicative purpose. For example, the candidate is asked to read a Greek magazine article about practical tips on taking care of a pet and to write an email to a friend who’s just been given a puppy as a present and has no clue about how to take care of it.

At levels A1+A2 candidates are not tested for their interlinguistic skills in the KPG exams and, therefore, they are not asked to produce a text in the target language by relaying information from a source text in Greek. However, translanguaging and parallel use of languages is exploited in two ways: firstly, the task rubrics are written in both Greek and in the target language, and secondly there are tasks in the reading and listening comprehension test papers which require the candidate to exhibit his/her understanding of a text in the target language by responding to choice items in Greek.

Glocal proficiency testing is more likely to use translanguaging, parallel use of two or more languages, as well as linguistic and cultural mediation tasks, whereas it seems not at all cost-effective to have bi- or mutli-lingual performance tested in international commercial exam batteries. The moment the product is localised, whether it a test or a textbook, it does not sell globally and makes less profit, if at all.

Mediation as a testing component, mediation task analysis and the performance on test tasks by Greek students of English has been the object of systematic research carried out at the Research Centre for English Language of the University of Athens (Dendrinos, 2011). A specific research project leading to an MA dissertation at the Faculty of English Studies of the University of Athens has shed light on discursively, textually and linguistically hybrid forms that successful communicators use (Stathopoulou, 2009)24 and other papers have discussed issues linked to the mediation component of the KPG exam.25 Soon, the findings of another major project will be

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23 Though intralinguistic mediation tasks are included in the writing test of the KPG exams, they are not labeled as ‘mediation’ tasks reserving the term only for interlinguistic tasks.
made available –a PhD thesis entitled *Mediation tasks and mediation performance by Greek users of English*, which is being completed by Stathopoulou. Future mediation related projects include work which aims at providing firstly functional illustrative scale descriptors for mediation performance and secondly linguistically-based scale descriptors.

3. Conclusion

All issues, which have been raised so far, have aimed at substantiating this chapter’s argument in favour of glocal proficiency language testing. Yet, the most important line of reasoning is related to the fact that language testing is “a powerful device that is imposed by groups in power to affect language priorities, language practices and criteria of correctness” (Shohamy, 2006: 93). Language tests have a definite impact on how the knowledge of language and communication is defined (cf. Shohamy, 2001a: 38) and affect people’s attitudes and understanding of what language is and how it operates. Because of this and other factors discussed here, it might be wiser that the responsibility for tests, which function as pedagogical but also as social and political instruments, with an impact on education and the social order (cf. Shohamy, 2006: 93), not be left to commercial, international testing. The command over the social values inhabiting tests and the control over the world embodied in the test texts might be better off in the care of domestic, non profit-driven educational and testing institutions that might be better trusted with the power to regulate the social and pedagogical identity of language learners. Glocal testing (if it is possible to develop glocal exam suites) can perhaps best serve citizenry as a socially sensitive antidote to the marketised products of the global testing conglomerates.

An important question, however, following the discussion above is whether any kind of proficiency testing (glocal or global) should be a constituent of the school curriculum in one way or other. This is an issue that has come up recently in Greece, as a demand by foreign language teachers and politicians. Teachers feel that the foreign language will be viewed as a school subject with more ‘weight’ and students will be even more motivated to do hard work, while the Ministry of Education has been under pressure to provide opportunity for proficiency certification within the context of the public school system, so that the average Greek family does not have to pay so much money for preparation classes offered by private-tuition language schools, most of which are associated directly with international exam systems leading to language certification.

The other side of the coin, however, is that proficiency language testing constitutes (in the words of Mulderrig (ibid) as quoted in Templer, (ibid) a ‘key transnational achievement arena where students are socialised into highly individualistic practices of competitive survival and self-responsibility’. There are of course several other washback effects of language testing on language teaching and learning, as many scholars have shown (e.g., Alderson & Wall, 1993;

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26 For the PhD thesis abstract visit: http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/kpg/research_phd1.htm
27 It has been estimated, through studies carried out at the Research Centre for English Language Teaching, Testing and Assessment (RCEL), that the total amount of money spent by the Greek family for private tuition language teaching –mainly in the form of proficiency exam preparation– and for international exam fees is about 600.000.000 euro a year.
Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Prodromou, 2003; Tsagari, 2009). They are not necessarily all negative. But, with its control over forms of knowledge, testing may distort the purpose of teaching and learning languages, implant a philosophy of measurable, result-driven learning. This is especially true of standardised testing that measures knowledge by numerical scores and is preoccupied by numerical performance on choice items, requiring certifiable demonstration of language skills (cf. Brosio, 2003; Hamp-Lyons, 1999; Lynch, 2001).

With this dilemma in mind, education and testing experts in Greece have advised the Greek Ministry of Education to take a middle-of-the-road decision. This entails first of all designing a new national curriculum for languages which contains researched illustrative descriptors of language proficiency on the 6 level scale of the Council of Europe – closely associated to the 6-level can-do-statements included in the KPG specifications. The new national language curriculum is a multilingual construct (a unified curriculum for all languages). Secondly, it has been decided not to turn regular language teaching classes into exam preparation lessons but to use financial resources, which have been made available to the two state universities, to provide teachers and students ICT support to prepare themselves for the KPG exams, if they wish, during extra-school hours or at home.

The group effort to develop the new integrated languages curriculum, and the collaboration between language teaching and testing scholars, researchers and practicing teachers of the different languages has facilitated the birth of a previously absent academic discourse on foreign language teaching and testing in Greece (cf. Macedo, Dendrinos & Gounari, 2003). This is perhaps one of the most important impacts of glocal projects of this nature: The KPG and the national languages curriculum project have motivated teamwork by people from the different foreign language didactics traditions. It may contribute to a shift from a monolingual to a multilingual paradigm in the field of language didactics in Greece. Such examples should be followed elsewhere as mainstream foreign language didactics and testing are still exclusively monolingual.

Bibliographical references

28 For the new languages curriculum, visit http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/xenesglosses
29 The curriculum was developed by a team of 25 applied linguists, junior researchers, teacher-development professionals and practicing teachers who were working under my academic direction.


