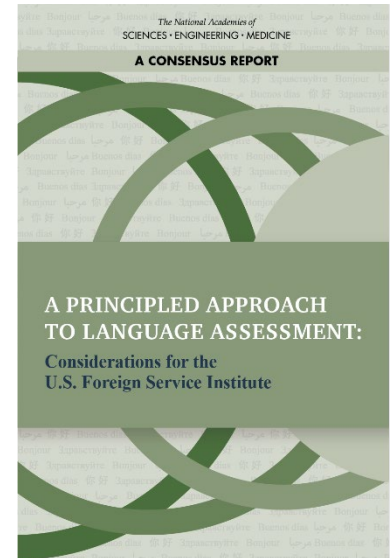




DIVISION OF BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES AND EDUCATION

*A Principled Approach to
Language Assessment:
Considerations for the U.S.
Foreign Service Institute*

Interagency Language Roundtable
September 25, 2020



Briefing Overview

- Study charge and committee process
- Committee's approach
- Foundational considerations
- Possible changes to the FSI test
- Next steps



Study Charge

- Review strengths and weaknesses of some key assessment approaches that FSI could apply in the Foreign Service context
- Don't make specific recommendations
- Don't evaluate the current test



Committee Process

- Interviewing experts
- Appointing committee
- 4 committee meetings
 - With FSI sessions in first 3 meetings
- Committee consensus on report
 - Revised report after internal feedback
- 9 external peer reviews
- Revised report



Committee

- **Dorry M. Kenyon** (Chair), *Center for Applied Linguistics*
- **David Dorsey**, *Human Resources Organization*
- **Lorena Llosa**, *New York University*
- **Robert J. Mislevy**, *Educational Testing Service*
- **Lia Plakans**, *University of Iowa*
- **James E. Purpura**, *Teachers College, Columbia University*
- **M. 'Elvis' Wagner**, *Temple University*
- **Paula M. Winke**, *Michigan State University*

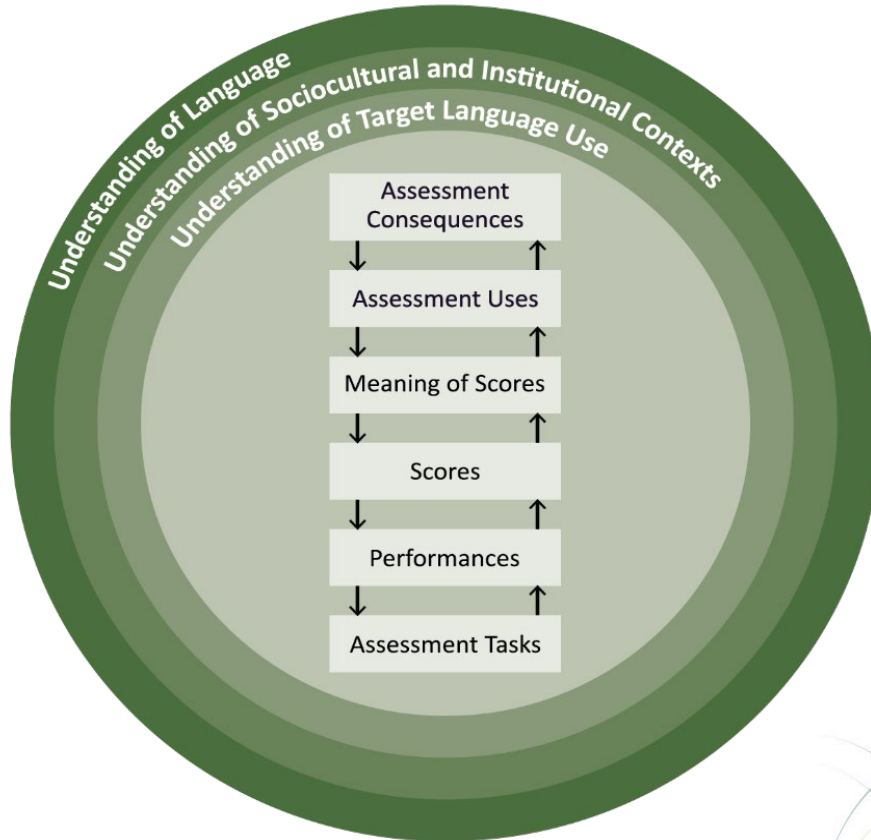


Reviewers

- Carol A. Chappelle, *Iowa State University*
- Brian E. Clauser, *National Board of Medical Examiners*
- Alistair Cumming, *University of Toronto*
- Luke Harding, *Lancaster University*
- Okim Kang, *Northern Arizona University*
- Patricia K. Kuhl, *University of Washington*
- Margaret E. Malone, *American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages*
- Frederick L. Oswald, *Rice University*
- Steven J. Ross, *University of Maryland, College Park*



Committee's Approach



Foundational Considerations

- Understanding of language
 - Trait-based approach (*language knowledge and strategic competence*)
 - Interactionist approach (+ *context*)
 - Meaning-oriented approach (+ *meaning*)
 - Task-based approach (*task fulfillment*)
- Note: current FSI test reflects these to some degree



Foundational Considerations

- Sociocultural contexts of language use
 - Multiple varieties of language (e.g., no gold standard)
 - Multilingual nature of language use (e.g., translanguaging)
 - Multimodal nature of language use (e.g., linguistic and non-linguistic modes)
- Note: current FSI test reflects these to some degree



Foundational Considerations

- Understanding language use in institutional contexts
 - Job analysis as a basis for **target language use**
 - domain analysis (FSI context)
- Note: current FSI test tasks reflect these to some degree



Possible Changes to the FSI Test

- Changes that might be motivated by possible goals
 - These are possibilities to consider (depending on FSI's actual goals) not recommendations
- Actual goals ...
 - Should be guided by a principled approach to language assessment
 - Would depend on FSI priorities



Possible Changes to the FSI Test

- Possible goals considered by committee
 - Broadening the construct of the test or the test's coverage of that construct
 - Increasing the reliability of the test scores and the fairness of their use
- Other considerations
 - Implications for instruction (“washback”)
 - Practical considerations (e.g., cost, logistics)



Possible Changes to the FSI Test

- Using multiple measures
 - Meta-strategy to combine different assessments with complementary strengths (some possibilities follow)
 - Could support broadening the construct and/or increasing reliability/fairness



Possible Changes to the FSI Test

- Possible changes to broaden the construct or the test's coverage of the construct
 - Scoring listening on the speaking test
 - Adding target-language writing as a response mode
 - Adding paired or group oral tests
 - Using recorded listening tasks with a range of language varieties and unscripted texts
 - Incorporating language supports
 - Adding a scenario-based assessment
 - Adding portfolios of work samples
 - Adding computer-administered tests with short reading and listening tasks



Possible Changes to the FSI Test

- Possible changes to increase the reliability of test scores and the fairness of their use
 - Adding computer-administered tests with short reading and listening tasks
 - Using automated assessment of speaking
 - Providing transparent scoring criteria
 - Using additional scorers
 - Providing more detailed score reports



Next Steps

- Key choice for FSI is the balance between
 - Evaluation to understand how the current approach is working and identify changes to make in light of a principled approach
 - Implementation of possible changes
- How much emphasis to place on each, given limited time and resources?

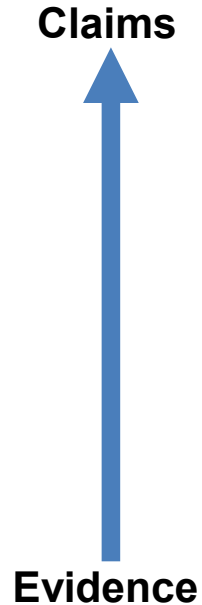
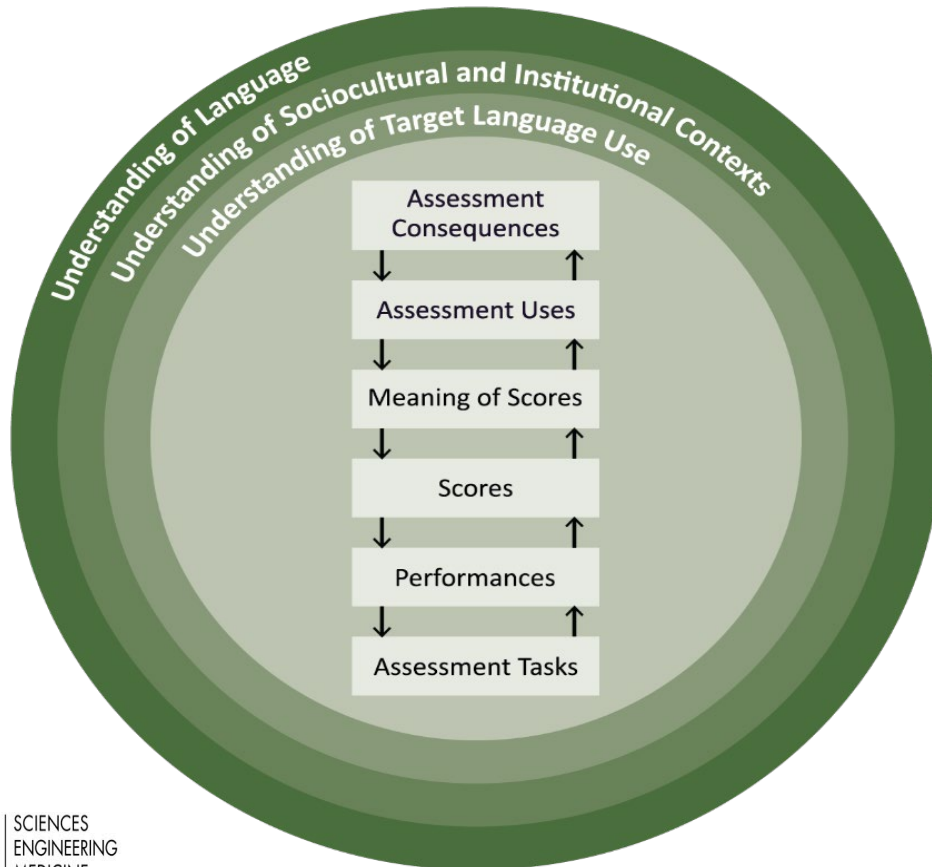


Next Steps

- Two questions vis-à-vis a principled approach
 1. Does FSI possess evidence related to validity?
 2. Is FSI following best practices recommended by professional standards?



1. Evidence Related to Validity



2. 11 Best Practices from Standards

- Examples from report
 - (4) Documentation related to **scoring processes**
 - (8) **Score reporting**
 - (11) **Information for test takers**



Next Steps

- Two questions vis-à-vis a principled approach
 1. Does FSI possess evidence related to validity?
 2. Is FSI following best practices recommended by professional standards?
- If no to one or both, more weight on evaluation
- If yes, more weight on implementation



Next Steps

- Considerations related to evaluation
 - Options to support in-house research
 - Technical advisory group
 - Visiting researchers and interns



Next Steps

- Considerations related to implementation
 - Constraint: common approach for all languages
 - Comparability of results is key, not identical procedure
 - Some variation already allowed (virtual testing, overlap between teacher and assessor)
 - Constraint: ILR framework
 - ILR doesn't provide key details specific to testing for Foreign Service officers
 - A possible new test that's not scored using ILR skill levels could still be mapped to ILR skill levels to coordinate personnel policies across agencies



Final Thoughts

- We commend FSI's forward-looking strategy
- We hope this report is a useful starting point for enhancing
 - The understanding of the test construct and how it is assessed
 - The reliability of the test scores and the fairness of their use
 - The potential beneficial influence of the test on instruction
 - The understanding, usefulness, and acceptance of the test across the State Department community



Questions and Discussion

Thank you!

