

University of Tikrit

College of Education for

Humanities English Department

Ph.D. Candidates



**Language Testing
Part 1**

Prof. Istabraq Tariq Alazzawi (Ph.D.)

2025-2026

1) Introduction: The place of Language Testing in Applied Linguistics:

Language testing has undergone a rapid evolution in the past 50 years, mirroring the development of applied linguistics more broadly. The replacement in the immediate post-war period of traditional assessment techniques, such as the translation and the composition by “scientific” tests based on linguistics (structuralism) and psychology (behaviorism), paralleled the advent of audiolingualism within language teaching.

Similarly, the introduction of communicative methods in the 1970s and 1980s was matched by a greater emphasis on performance tests within language testing, where candidates were required to display practical control of language knowledge under real time processing conditions, and within specified contexts of use.

In Pit Corder’s famous **Introducing Applied Linguistics**, there are **grounds** for the view that language testing represents one of the core areas of applied linguistics:

- ❖ **First**, the development of a language test involves a careful definition of the domain of knowledge, skill, or ability it is targeting.
- ❖ **Second**, data from language tests can be used to reflect on the adequacy of models and constructs of particular aspects of second language knowledge and skill, which have been developed in other areas of applied linguistics, such as in second language acquisition.
- ❖ **Third**, research in many of the fields of applied linguistics requires language tests as tools for research.
- ❖ **Finally**, the importance of language tests is a function of the social and political roles they play.

1.1 Reasoning in language tests

Language testing is a process of gathering information about test-takers from observed performance under test conditions. This is done in order to draw

inferences either about the possible quality of performance by the test-taker under non-test conditions, or about the test-taker's standing in relation to a relevant domain of knowledge and abilities. We thus make a distinction between the test (the means of drawing inferences) and the criterion (the target of test inferences, which are necessarily mediated through test, constructs depending on terms of its essential features or characteristics.

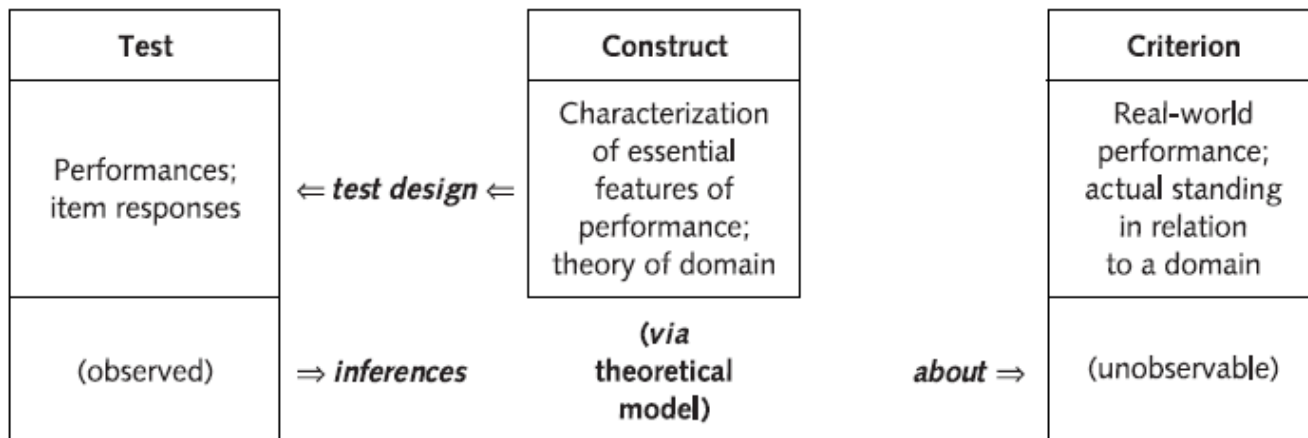


Figure 31.1 Test, construct, and criterion

Canale and Swain have engaged the field of language testing in dynamic argument to the modeling of the nature of general language ability, in which the model of communicative competence in L2 started in 1980. This built on the work of Hymes (1972) on communicative competence in the mother tongue, which expressed an including view of language knowledge and its relation to performance. Hymes was motivated by the learners' needs in schools who were facing learning difficulties underlying knowledge and skill in areas relevant to a particular social and cultural context of the classroom.

Hymes saw the ability to take part in communicative events particular to a culture as a function both of knowledge of linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects, but also of personality factors, of other kinds of knowledge, motivation, and the like. Canale and Swain took a narrower view: they specifically excluded general performance skills and focused on defining the

dimensions of language knowledge underlying performance in second language communicative tasks.

Following Hymes, they distinguished sociolinguistic competence (knowledge of the way language use is shaped by cultural contracts in particular communities of use) from linguistic competence (simple control of the linguistic system (including grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) independently of its use in particular social and cultural contexts.

Bachman (1990) modified the Canale and Swain model in his model of communicative language ability known as **“the Bachman Model”**. Bachman explained aspects of the Canale and Swain model, reorganized it, and recognized that strategic competence was an aspect of general reasoning, and thus more properly understood as a general cognitive skill rather than an aspect of language knowledge.

- According to Canale and Swain (1980) and Bachman’s model (1990):

- **Broader view** of language testing focuses on communicative competence that is, the overall ability to use language appropriately in real contexts (communicative ability).
- **Narrower view** focuses on linguistic or grammatical competence only including elements such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation without much attention to real communication (linguistic form).

- This model includes the following factors:

- Grammatical competence (knowledge of syntax, vocabulary, etc.)
- Sociolinguistic competence (using language appropriately in different social contexts)
- Discourse competence (linking ideas coherently in spoken/written text)
- Strategic competence (using strategies to overcome communication problems)

