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0521653819 - An Empirical Investigation of the Componentiality of L2 Reading in English
for Academic Purposes

Cyril J. Weir, Yang Huizhong and Jin Yan

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Series Editor's note

This volume represents an interesting and important study in the assessment of reading for academic purposes. The approach adopted is very methodical and follows a clear development and validation pattern thus acting as a valuable case study for anyone developing language tests.

The project was based in China and financially supported both by the British Department for International Development (DFID) and the Chinese National College English Testing Committee. DFID has supported numerous English Language Teaching and Testing projects throughout the world and was particularly active in China during the 1980s and 1990s where it also helped in the development of the College English Test (CET) now widely used at the tertiary level in China. A forthcoming volume in this series will focus on the validation of the CET.

English Language Testing in China is characterised by projects like this one which demonstrate a genuine interest in developing effective and validated measures of English Language ability. Along side CET the public English Testing System (PETS) has been developed recently. This project, funded by the DFID and the State Education Commission (SEC) was carried out by the National Educational Examinations Authority (NEEA) and the EFL Division of the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate (UCLES). Taking place between 1997 and 2000 the PETS project developed a five level system of English language tests that aimed to rationalize a much larger number of tests developed and implemented in a more haphazard manner over many years. The project was driven by the stated aim of the Chinese government to raise the standards of English throughout China. Testing is seen as an important tool in achieving this aim and for the first time the assessment of writing speaking and listening are integral parts of a testing system in China from the outset. Direct criterion-referenced assessment poses substantial logistic difficulties in China with its enormous population and it is to the credit of the authorities that they were prepared to undertake such an initiative.

Michael Milanovic
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Preface

This study reports on an empirical investigation of the componentiality of L2 Reading in English for academic purposes. The focus on careful reading in the theoretical literature has meant that we have somewhat ignored expeditious reading behaviours such as skimming, search reading and scanning in the teaching and testing of reading. We have theories of careful reading but very little on how readers process texts quickly and selectively, i.e., expeditiously, to extract important information in line with intended purpose(s).

Furthermore, because of a focus on the local level e.g. word recognition or syntactic parsing, only limited attention has been paid to careful reading at the global level ie comprehension of the main ideas in a text or of the discourse topic; the macropropositional as against the micropropositional level of text. In addition to careful reading at the local level, we felt it was important to explore a further four kinds of reading: Search reading, Skimming, Scanning, Careful Reading (at the global level).

The development of the Advanced English Reading Test (AERT) for University students in the People's Republic of China under the auspices of the National College English Test Committee was the vehicle for investigating the nature of and the relationships between these different types of reading at the macro level. The project was developed at CALS, University of Reading with colleagues from Shanghai Jiatong University in China. A number of CALS staff worked on the project with the Chinese members of the development group and in particular Rita Green made a valuable contribution to the project activities reported below.

This volume reports on the methodological procedures that led to the development of this important test and discusses the results of the empirical investigations that were carried out to establish its validity both *a priori* and *a posteriori*. As such it offers a blueprint for those wishing to research in the area as well as generating data on these different reading styles of interest to both testers and teachers of reading in an additional language as well as researchers.

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