**Corpora & Cambridge Assessment English: A Widening Perspective**

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2016 saw the 10th anniversary of the *English Profile Programme*, itself a marker in the longstanding commitment of *Cambridge Assessment English* to corpus-based research (Barker, 2006, 2016). That commitment is based on at least two premises. Firstly, and especially given our wider commitment to a communicative view of language ability and language assessment, corpora represent an invaluable resource for understanding how learners use and develop their linguistic resources. Secondly, corpora represent a core means of expanding our technological capabilities; underpinning, for example, the development and validity of auto-marked tests such as *Linguaskill* and its newly launched variant *Linguaskill Business*.

Both premises are reflected in the wide range of practical purposes to which *Cambridge English* already puts corpora and corpus-based methods; from the ongoing process of test validation and test revision (e.g. Shaw & Weir, 2007; Elliott & Lim, 2016; Saville, 2003) through to the development of key assessment resources such as *English Profile*, the official English Reference Level Description for the *Common European Framework of Reference* (Harrison & Barker, 2015). They are also reflected in our commitment to the establishment and expansion of novel corpora, most notably the *Cambridge Learner Corpus* and the *Cambridge English Profile Corpus*, as well as our longstanding tradition of working within a wider community of researchers such as *ALTA* and *Cambridge University Press*.

So framed, the present talk will proceed in two parts. The first will provide a more detailed overview of current research activities at *Cambridge Assessment English*, outlining how they inform the development of exams such as *Linguaskill* and *Cambridge English Qualifications*. The second offers a wider perspective on prospects for expanding the practical role of corpora, including our plans for new resources such as the development of a spoken learner corpus to complement the written *Cambridge Learner Corpus*.

Central to the wider perspective outlined in the second half is the increasing dominance of computer-based testing. This dominance promises to be a boon for our corpus-based activities, providing for learner performances that are not only more extensively available, but in a format that makes them substantially easier to process. In turn, this availability is complemented by the value of this material as a means of further driving the quality of our assessment work, whether this be along the more technological dimensions of areas like auto-marking and plagiarism detection, or in terms of our capacity for continuing to develop an approach to assessment that is fully learner-oriented in the sense of Jones & Saville (2016).

At the same time, however, the sheer scale of material that computer-based testing is increasingly making available raises a number of important considerations. One of these is the challenge of ensuring that we are able to systematically process, organize, and integrate such a large, ever-expanding body of material so as to maximise its effectiveness. Another is the challenge of ensuring that our increasing practical use of such material does not become a validational straightjacket; rather, that we continue to interrogate how this material can best be analysed, whether on its own terms, in its relation to “external” corpora, or in relation to non-corpus based methods and sources of information. Each of these considerations represents a substantive challenge to the wider validity of corpus-based assessment work. Addressing them will be central to ensuring that *Cambridge English* continues to reap the benefits of its longstanding commitment to this form of research.

**References**

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