

Ecological Approach to Second Language Evaluation Processes

The Symbolic Competence of Oral Proficiency Interviewers

Vovou Evangelia, MA., Hellenic Open University

The study investigates second language socialization processes in intercultural environments and tries to overcome not only language, but also and foremost culture barriers through observations of language ecology in multilingual milieus based on language data. The research denotes the notion of symbolic competence (Kramsch/Whiteside 2008) as an update of communicative competence destined for language users in multilingual environments. Based on Kramsch's (2008) observations that symbolic competence, deriving from Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power, can exist and should be developed in a micro level, that is through foreign language acquisition practices in institutional contexts, the study goes one step further into discussing the existence of symbolic competence in the field of oral proficiency testing from the interviewer's side.

In order to achieve this goal the study examines narrowly language data in intercultural testing contexts from an ecolinguistic point of view, that is considering all ecolinguistic parameters, such as the demographic, the social, the political, the cultural, the psychological, the interactional and the linguistic, while using the principles of discourse analysis. For this purpose data from oral examinations of the KPg German Language Exam (a high-stakes Greek language assessment system) was collected, transcribed and analyzed. Research findings resulted in the categorization of manifestations of the interviewers' symbolic competence in two components: features of accommodation and features of control. The study then comes to the conclusion that ratings of oral proficiency competence may be subject to both pragmatic and cultural phenomena. In order to produce validated test scores, test developers should consider the influence of the interviewers' *lieux de mémoire*. Finally, the study argues that the symbolic competence of both interviewers and interviewees could have a great impact on language testing frameworks.