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Language for Specific Purpose (LSP) performance assessment in Asian call centres: strong and weak definitions

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Abstract

LSP performance assessment has become a special focus for language testers in recent years where experts have debated how testing tools and processes can be strengthened to more accurately and more validly assess professional communication at work. Suggestions to achieve this include ethnographic studies of the target language situation; authentic discourse analyses of the relevant texts; and subject matter experts (SMEs) being invited as informants when defining 'successful' communication at work. These are proposed as key steps in building LSP performance assessment validity (see for example Jacoby & McNamara: English for Specific Purposes 18(3):203–241, 1999). Language testing researchers have also suggested there may be some merit in distinguishing LSP performance as 'weak' and 'strong' (see also McNamara: Measuring Second Language Performance, 1996; Douglas: Language Testing 18(2):171–185, 2001) although clear lines of distinction between these have not yet been made in LSP assessment studies to date.

In this article I propose a distinction between a 'weak' and 'strong' version of LSP performance assessment based on the empirical data collected over the last ten years