

## **Technological Growth and L2 Construct Definition: Will Applied Linguistics Keep Pace with Language Users?**

**Ian Blood**

*Teachers College, Columbia University*

Chapelle (2003) coined the phrase “tunnel of efficiency” to describe what she considers a truncation of vision on the part of applied linguists who have studied technological innovations in L2 assessment. This nearsightedness, she argues, has led to an overemphasis of research that serves immediate practical considerations, i.e., faster, more efficient delivery and scoring of traditional tests. Underemphasized is the question of how the rapidly advancing availability and widespread use of new technology can or should change L2 constructs. To maintain the relevance of our field and coherently evaluate the validity of L2 assessment use arguments, we must pay attention to these questions.

The statistical backdrop of growth in technology over the past decade is staggering. Well over two billion of us now have access to the internet, an 11% rise since 2010, and growth in the “developing” world now outpaces that in the “developed” world (ITU, 2012). Facebook reports one billion active users as of October 2012—*one seventh of the living world*—81% of whom live outside the U.S. and Canada (Facebook, 2012). The phenomenon of the “social business model”—the adoption of social media tools by the world’s commercial and non-commercial organizations—is also advancing rapidly. Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, and Kruschwitz (2012) report that 52% of respondents to an international survey of business executives believe that technology-based social media are important to their businesses now, and 86% think they will be within three years. This perception of new media’s value is not limited to marketing applications. Respondents’ top three reported reasons for using social networking at work were to “network with others in the organization,” “work more effectively,” and “voice opinions,” suggesting that the new media are fast becoming part of how businesses share knowledge with their own (Kiron et al., 2012).

These trends raise questions that should be of pressing concern for applied linguists and language testers; has change in language use kept pace with change in the use of communications media over the past decade? If so, how? And what are the implications for L2 teaching and testing? Answering these questions is a prerequisite to achieving rigor in the specification and sampling of target language use (TLU) domains, the authentic operational definition of L2 constructs and test item design, all of which are critical to the evaluation of the L2 assessment use validity argument. We need a deeper understanding of what Chapelle (2003) calls the “electronic literacy experiences of L2 users” (p. 166). This requires descriptive research into communicative practices in the arenas that create demand for language tests, such as higher education, business, and government. More importantly, we must be willing to allow the outcome of this research to change the way we test.

## REFERENCES

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