Towards a construct
for assessing high level
language ability in Grade 12

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A conceptual framework for the assessment of Home Languages

Research studies already commissioned by Umalusi confirm that the emphasis up to now has been on the determination of standards and the compilation of comprehensive and revised curriculum statements. What has not been addressed in depth on the language curriculum side is the system of assessment that is being used and whether the current examination format of the respective language papers sufficiently reflects the revised curriculum. A further aspect that needs scrutiny is the quality and standard of the assessment in the exit-level examinations. Even before the introduction of the NSC and the outcomes-based curriculum, assessment practices were identified as an area of contention in the 2007 report on "Making educational judgements: Reflections on judging standards of intended and examined curricula" (Umalusi 2011b). The need to consider the role of technology as an aid to determining standards and improving the examination system was highlighted in the report of the following year which covered the possibility of item banking and Item Response Theory (IRT) as a means of introducing equivalence between examination papers. Specific mention was made in this report to the necessity of "conceptual clarity of the underlying construct" as a requirement for employing any form of psychometric measurement (*ibid.* 2011b: 23).

Attempting to problematize a unitary construct for measuring the language ability of Grade 12 learners is somewhat ambitious in light of the multi-faceted nature of language and the fact that more than one ability is likely to be assessed simultaneously. The very notion of a construct is also something that needs explaining. Amongst the terms used in language testing literature in relation to the construct are 'blueprint', 'rubric', 'specification' and 'trait' (see Davidson and Lynch 2002: 3; Davies, Brown, Elder, Hill, Lumley & McNamara 1999: 31; Hughes 2003: 26; Van Dyk & Weideman 2004a: 1; Weir 2005: 6), but treating these synonymously can only confuse matters further. Construct seems to be the word most widely used to refer to the overall ability or trait being measured. Patterson and Weideman (2013 forthcoming) provide some clarification by redefining the construct to refer to a "theoretically defensible definition of what it is that should be measured". Much more is thus involved than merely identifying the underlying ability. There has to be a theoretical rationale behind the

construct, in other words the ability must be defensible in terms of current concepts and ideas. As will be seen later in the discussion, any articulation of a construct is dependent, amongst other things, on the typical features of the discourse involved. Examinees will differ not only in their ability to "handle each different type of discourse" signalling a differential ability (Patterson & Weideman 2013: 2), but also in their command of certain features of language across different types of discourse.

For the sake of clarity, the term 'specification' will be used in this report to refer to the detailed articulation of the construct. The list of specifications and accompanying task types to be performed in order to generate the needed evidence of the defined ability will be used collectively to refer to the blueprint of the test or examination. 'Rubric' will be reserved for instructions on the marking and rating side of assessment.

As a first step to address the construct issue, this paper examines the new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) from the perspective of the aims of the new curriculum, theories of language learning that inform assessment practices, and those language abilities reflected in the policy document, in order to develop a conceptual framework for the assessment of the Home Languages at the end of the Grade 12 year of schooling, and lay the foundation for a plan to ensure greater equivalence among assessments across the various Home Languages.

General aims of the South African curriculum

In terms of the provisions of section 61 of the South African Schools Act (Act No. 84 of 1996 as amended), the Minister of Basic Education has the right to decide on the minimum outcomes and standards of the language curriculum, as well as determine the processes and procedures for the assessment of learning in all South African schools:

> Regulation
> 61. The Minister may make regulations on any matter which must or may be prescribed by regulation under this Act and any matter which may be necessary or expedient to prescribe in order to achieve the objects of this Act.

Any conceptual framework for the assessment of the Home Languages would thus need to be developed within the parameters of the norms and standards of the National

Curriculum Statement Grades R-12, which is to be implemented in full by 2014. For the purposes of clarity and unnecessary avoidance of repetition of detail, all references in this paper pertaining to the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 shall be understood to be referring to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for the Further Education and Training Phase (Grades 10-12) and Home Languages in particular.

It is of particular importance to the discussion that the policy document of the Department of Basic Education declares that the broad purpose of the curriculum is to enable learners to operate in a number of diverse contexts. They should be able to participate in "society as citizens of a free country", have "access to higher education", and be able to make the transition from "education institutions to the workplace" (Department of Basic Education 2011: 4). Together these objectives provide the background against which language learning and assessment should take place and are of particular relevance when deciding on appropriate language-related tasks that learners should be able to execute if they are to be able to operate as *highly* literate citizens within the different realms of society. It is noteworthy, furthermore, that CAPS underwrites the principle of "*high* knowledge and *high* skills" and the minimum standards to be attained are to be "*high*, achievable standards in all subjects" (*ibid.* 2011: 4).

A distinction is made in CAPS between different levels of teaching that apply to each of the eleven official languages and other non-official languages on offer. These levels are referred to as Home Language (HL) level and First Additional Language (FAL) level. Technically speaking, the notion of Home Language would refer to that language used by a learner within the context of the home and concurrently the first language acquired. In reality, however, a learner may have been exposed to more than one language in the home from infancy and the language spoken in the home context may not be offered as a subject in all schools, thus necessitating the learning of an Additional Language at Home Language level. In order to resolve this dilemma, the CAPS document makes it clear that the distinction of Home Language applies to the *level* at which the language is offered rather than the language itself. The standard thus set for HL level is higher than that set for FAL level, although in pragmatic terms the competency level of a learner may be the same for both levels. In light then of the level

of difficulty that is to distinguish HL from FAL and on the basis of the information contained in section 2.1 of CAPS, two levels of proficiency can be identified which are applicable to the assessment of language at Home Language level:

1. Social level:
   "the mastery of basic interpersonal communication skills required in social situations";
2. Educational level:
   "cognitive academic skills essential for learning across the curriculum", including "literary, aesthetic and imaginative ability".

(Department of Basic Education 2011: 8)

Reference is also made at the end of section 2.1 to the necessity of being able to use an Additional Language at a sufficiently high standard in order to be able to gain access to "further or higher education or the world of work" (*ibid.* 2011: 9). In view of the latter a third level of proficiency can then be added to the two mentioned above, that of the economic level which would require the mastery of language skills needed for professional and employment purposes and access to trade and industry. The three levels identified above – social, educational and economic – are operationalized in CAPS in a number of different fields of discourse, which will be dealt with later.

Apart from the general aims of the curriculum, CAPS identifies the following specific aims for the learning of languages:

Learning a language should enable learners to:
- acquire the language skills required for academic learning across the curriculum;
- listen, speak, read/view and write/present the language with confidence and enjoyment. These skills and attitudes form the basis for life-long learning;
- use language appropriately, taking into account audience, purpose and context;
- express and justify, orally and in writing, their own ideas, views and emotions confidently in order to become independent and analytical thinkers;
- use language and their imagination to find out more about themselves and the world around them. This will enable them to express their experiences and findings about the world orally and in writing.
- use language to access and manage information for learning across the curriculum and in a wide range of other contexts. Information

literacy is a vital skill in the 'information age' and forms the basis for life-long learning; and

- use language as a means for critical and creative thinking; for expressing their opinions on ethical issues and values; for interacting critically with a wide range of texts; for challenging the perspectives, values and power relations embedded in texts; and for reading texts for various purposes, such as enjoyment, research, and critique.
(Department of Basic Education 2011: 9)

A detailed exposition of the content that is to be covered in the language classrooms so as to meet these specific aims and how the needed skills are to be developed is provided in more detail in section 3 of CAPS. Together the respective sections provide a full articulation of abilities that need to be mastered in the Further Education and Training Phase and constitute the basis for formulating a construct for the assessment of Home Languages. It is immediately clear, however, that the conceptual terminology adopted here articulates the intention to develop in learners a differentiated language ability so that by the end of their school careers they have mastery of language(s) in a wide range of different (educational and academic; aesthetic; political; economic; social and informational; ethical) contexts and situations. It is equally important, moreover, to acknowledge that the same starting points and assumptions that constitute the basis for the teaching of the language curriculum need to inform the assessment side of language learning too.

The policy statement therefore clearly emphasises the provision of language teaching that is relevant to different realms and applicable at different levels. Both functional levels and differentiated variety of language can be identified, not only in the instance of Home Language teaching, but also in terms of First Additional Language teaching. No doubt the rationale for this is to be found in the multicultural context of the South African classroom and multiple identities of the learners themselves, realities, already referred to above, that complicate the identification of what is to be understood as the Home Language or First Additional Language of a learner. In summary, from the general aims and principles of the policy document, different lingual realities or spheres can be identified which, together with functionally defined language notions of language use, form part of a contextual and theoretical framework within which language teaching and assessment should take place.

Conceptual distinctions that inform CAPS and may serve as a basis for the formulation of an underlying construct for language assessment

There is no doubt that the conceptual framework that underlies CAPS goes back to linguistic ideas originating in the early 1970s on a differentiated communicative competence (Habermas 1970; Hymes 1972; Halliday 1978) that supports actual language use by varied repertoires of functionally defined language acts (Searle 1969; Wilkins 1976). In their subsequent development, these constitute socially informed ideas about language that have not only disclosed and broadened our perspective of what constitute language ability and language use – that mastery of language, for example, is much more than having a grammatical command of it – but have also weathered well. They have informed, for example, cutting-edge language teaching in Australia, and have provided the theoretical rationale for a whole spectrum of genre-based approaches to language teaching (Carstens 2009). It should therefore not be surprising that CAPS refers to the teaching approaches underlying it as communicative and text-based (Department of Basic Education 2011: 11). Moreover, language structures should be learned in an integrated way so that they "aid successful communication" and are "linked to the functional uses of language in different social settings" (*ibid.* 2011: 10-11). This conceptual framework, it should be noted, is wholly in line with current international thinking about language use and language mastery.

At the basis of these disclosed and enriched sociolinguistic ideas about language is the notion that language operates in particular contexts and lingual spheres, relating to what Halliday refers to as fields of discourse (Halliday 1978: 221). Weideman (2009b: 40) explains that these spheres may be considered material since they are governed by "*typical* norms and principles that give a different content to the factual language used" within a situation. Consequently, distinct lexical and syntactic differences can be discerned in the language used in diverse contexts. The norms that regulate the lingual spheres are typical because they apply to social forms or relationships that require a typical kind of language use within a particular temporal and structural context. Human beings as the users of language fulfil a subjective lingual role in which they then select

from a repertoire of already developed registers in order to express themselves through language in ways deemed appropriate to a given situation.

Weideman elucidates further that the notion of materially distinct lingual spheres is indicative of a "differentiated classification of language types that is inextricably bound up with the *subjective* human lingual capacity for producing *objective*, factual language in various social spheres" (*ibid.* 2009b: 41). Hence the distinction needs to be made between lingual fact and lingual norm. The factual context alone is inadequate when determining what type of language should be used, because of the "normative principles of a logical, aesthetic, legal, technico-formative, economic, social, ethical or confessional nature" (*ibid.* 2009b: 41) that guide and stamp language use in different contexts. One thus needs to distinguish between the language situation itself, and the conditions for using language in that situation. Such a distinction is extremely important when articulating any construct or ability to be assessed within the context of a language examination and obviously also when designing assessment rubrics.

Weideman (2009b: 48) points out that "material or typical differences are discernible too on almost every level of language: phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and so forth". The use of different dialects within communities and varying tones of voice to convey meaning further illustrate this. Language derives its meaning from more than a code or set of symbols. When using the term 'typical' to denote lingual spheres, this should be understood as referring to that which is "lingually typical" (*ibid.* 2009b: 49).

Humans seem to have an inherent ability (a communicative competence) to recognize and use different varieties of language. Vocabulary plays a role in distinguishing between material lingual spheres, but is insufficient on its own because, in different contexts, language is qualified by various aspects of our experience. As such it would seem that each sphere has a typical language of its own. Moreover, the social structure in which the language is employed is responsible for further distinctions, for example of different roles we assume when using language: as speakers or hearers; as writers or readers; as listeners and note-takers or as lecturers and teachers; as co-conversationalists, that is as alternating current speakers and next speakers; as litigants or chairpersons; as worshippers; as fans or friends; as entertainers and producers or audiences; as shoppers or assistants, and the like.

The advantage of employing a systematic and theoretical framework such as the above one pertaining to material lingual spheres when teaching and assessing language is that provision can be made in the school examination system for both a differentiated language ability within different material lingual spheres, as well as a generic language ability incorporating functional and formal aspects of language. This would also allow for the accommodation of attributes peculiar to a particular language group and possible differences in the maturity and status of some of the indigenous languages which may not be equally well represented in all of the material lingual spheres.

In terms of the content of the language curriculum outlined in CAPS, the dominant material lingual spheres of relevance to the teaching and assessment of the respective languages would seem to be the following:

- social (including inter-personal communication and the handling of information)
- educational (including academic and scientific language and advanced language ability)
- aesthetic (including the appreciation of literature and art)
- economic (including the world of work and commerce)
- political (including the critical discernment of power relations in discourse)
- ethical (including an appreciation of the values embedded in language use)

The only material lingual sphere not as prominently reflected in CAPS as some of the others, and thus perhaps not as pertinent to learners at school level, seems to be the legal or juridical sphere, which may be considered to be of too specialised a nature. Incidentally the first four dominant material lingual spheres identified in CAPS correspond closely with the list of approved teaching subjects stipulated in Annexure B of the policy document, *National policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12* (Department of Basic Education n.d. [online]), and listed in Table 1.

Type of sphere	Subject
Social	Human and social studies, languages
Aesthetic	Culture and arts, languages
Educational/academic	Mathematical, physical, computer and life sciences, agriculture, engineering and technology, languages
Economic/financial	Business, commerce and management studies, consumer, hospitality and tourism services

Table 1: Approved school subjects that comply with the programme requirements of Grades 10-12

The sociolinguistic ideas referred to in this report generally make a distinction possible between the norms for language that are provided by and in such lingual spheres or discourse types, and the factual language usage ('texts') that occur in the various spheres of discourse.

Conditions for language
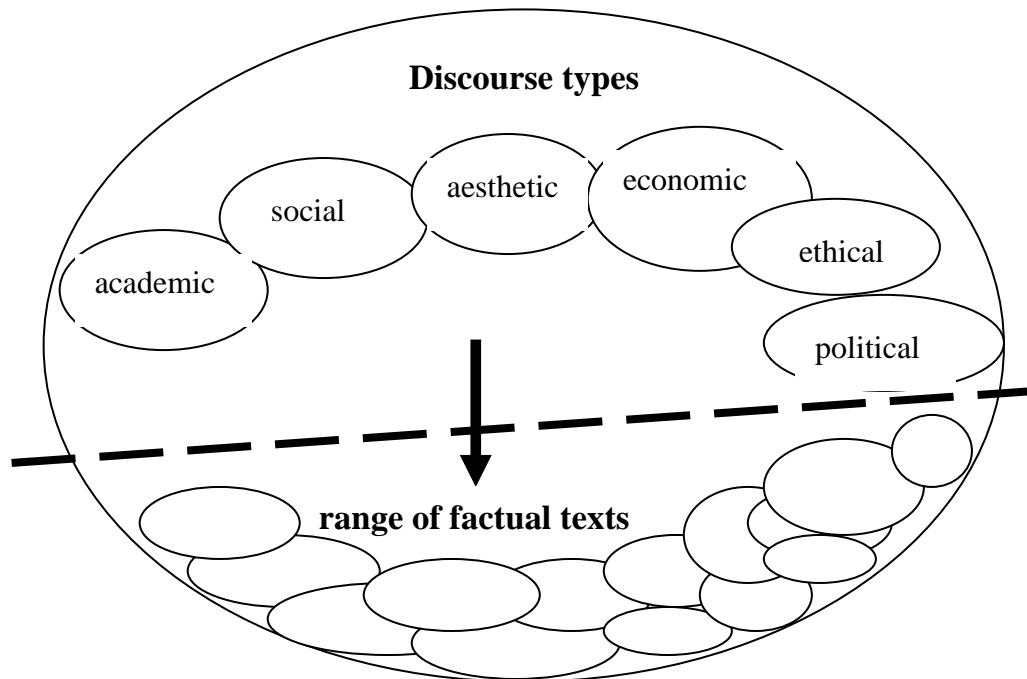
Discourse spheres therefore provide the conditions or requirements for a wide range of factual texts. This differentiated variety of discourse types supports the notion not only of a differential ability of language use (a differentiated communicative competence), but also guarantees the differences in different kinds of text. CAPS makes provision for

this in enumerating a wide variety of text types that should be taught, but does not seem to take into account to what extent each of the indigenous languages has developed historically and that not all discourse types may be applicable to all languages. This should be clarified later in the research project. The combinations of texts relating to the teaching of reading and writing and relevant to the Home Language examination papers[1] are summarised in Tables 2 and 3 below according to the dominant spheres. In addition, ethical and political texts may occur in any of these.

Type of discourse	Type of factual reading text in each of these spheres
Social	Letters, diaries, invitations, emails, sms's, twitter, notes, reports, telephone directories, television guides, dialogues, blogs, Facebook, social networks
Aesthetic	Novels, dramas, short stories, poetry, films, radio and television, series/documentaries, radio dramas, essays, biographies, autobiographies, folk tales, myths and legends, songs, jokes, photographs, illustrations, music videos, cartoons, comic strips
Educational	Dictionaries, encyclopaedias, schedules, textbooks, thesauruses, timetables, magazine articles, newspaper articles, editorials, notices, obituaries, reviews, brochures, speeches, charts, maps, graphs, tables, pie charts, mind-maps, diagrams, posters, flyers, pamphlets, signs and symbols, television documentaries, internet sites, data projection, transparencies, caricatures, graffiti
Economic/financial	Formal letters, minutes and agendas, advertisements, web pages

Table 2: Fields of discourse illustrating differentiated reading texts in CAPS

Type of discourse	Type of factual text to be written
Social	Formal and informal letters, dialogues, speeches, interviews, obituaries,
Aesthetic	Narrative and descriptive essays, reviews of art, films or books
Educational	Literary essays, argumentative, discursive and reflective essays, reports, newspaper articles, magazine articles
Economic/financial	Transactional texts, formal letters, minutes, memoranda and agendas, interviews, curriculum vitae

Table 3: Fields of discourse illustrating differentiated writing texts in CAPS

Some overlapping of texts and text types across fields or spheres of discourse is naturally possible. For example, a magazine article may be both aesthetic and educational, while a formal letter could apply both in the economic and social realms. The ability of the Grade 12 learners to operate at different levels of proficiency in these

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[1] The assessment of speaking proficiency forms part of school-based assessment, but the oral examination component contributes 12,5% of the final school-leaving percentage.

diverse spheres and to display versatility in terms of register and style is what needs to be assessed summatively in the final exit-level examinations. The only way to do this is through examination specifications in the form of language-related tasks selected on a systematic basis so as to be able to provide sufficient evidence of ability. Whether the current structure of the examination papers and selection of tasks may be considered to provide an adequate basis for evaluating language ability remains to be seen in the detailed analysis of the language papers. An underrepresentation of essential abilities or the inclusion of unessential or irrelevant tasks would undermine validity (see Davidson & Lynch 2002: 11, Weir 2005: 18). The latter will form part of the discussion in subsequent reports on the validation of the language papers. Some tasks may only be applicable to a small category of individuals in society, for example creative writing ability commensurate with that of a novelist or poet. A case in question would be the kinds of tasks included in section A of paper 3. A further concern would be to what extent all of the text types would apply to those languages that have not been developed to the level of language of instruction at an institution of higher education.

In addition to a clear emphasis in CAPS on a differentiated language ability, there is at the same time an indication in it that general, advanced level language skills, employable across this differentiated set of lingual spheres, are as important. Sections 3.2 and 3.3 of CAPS cover what learners should be able to do in terms of the reading and viewing process, as well as when writing and presenting (Department of Basic Education 2011: 22-40). These abilities should be considered the full set of test specifications from which a selection has to be made when articulating the blueprint for the examination of language ability. Their definition, however, will possess, as we shall note below, both a generic and a differentiated side. These are two sides of the same coin, constituting a construct of what should be developed in learners through the instructional process, and what should be measured during and at the end of that in Grade 12.

Reading and viewing for comprehending and appreciating texts

Four broad categories of generic abilities related to the different aspects involved in reading and viewing are specified: i) the reading process; ii) interpretation of visual texts; (iii) vocabulary development and language use; (iv) sentence structures and the organisation of texts. The detailed list of tasks to be performed when reading or viewing texts has been provided in Appendix A.

(i) The reading process (applicable to all text types)

A three-phase process is followed, which includes pre-reading, reading and post-reading strategies such as skimming and scanning texts, visualising, predicting, evaluating, drawing conclusions, distinguishing between fact and opinion, and making meaning. One anomalous aspect of CAPS is that it harbours a possible contradiction: on the one hand it utilises the outdated notion of a separation of language 'skills' (listening and speaking, reading and writing), and on the other it requires their 'integration'. This becomes really problematic when, in assessing reading abilities, writing tasks are included such as summarising the main and supporting points or requiring learners to reproduce in their own writing the genre of text that they have read. A solution might be to accept that listening, reading, speaking and writing cannot in the first instance really be separated: they are intertwined in just about all instances of language use. In fact, a skills-neutral view of language takes us much further (Weideman 2013), and it is likely that this factual integration will be reflected in the final recommendations of our report.

The development of critical language awareness receives considerable prominence in CAPS and a number of critical abilities are listed which learners should develop. This is an area of learning that requires not only advanced language ability, but other kinds of knowledge, e.g. an awareness of current issues, human rights and environmental concerns. The construct thus goes beyond the testing of an advanced general language ability into the realm of advanced civic, ethical and academic literacy. Table 5 provides a selection of higher order abilities extracted from CAPS.

Critical language awareness involves the ability to:

- Distinguish between facts and opinions
- Understand direct and implied meaning
- Understand denotation and connotation
- Be aware of the socio-political and cultural background of texts and authors
- Notice the effect of selections and omissions on meaning
- Understand the relationship between language and power
- Recognize emotive and manipulative language, bias, prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping
- Recognize language varieties
- Recognize inferences, assumptions and arguments
- Identify the purpose of including or excluding information

Table 4: Reading tasks requiring critical language awareness and advanced language ability (Department of Basic Education 2011: 23)

The inclusion of a critical language awareness component in the National Curriculum Statement is justified by its purpose of "providing access to higher education" and principle of "active and critical learning: encouraging an active and critical approach to learning, rather than rote and uncritical learning of given truths" (Department of Basic Education 2012: 4). Studies on the academic literacy levels of university students suggest that far more attention needs to be devoted to critical thinking and reading at school level to eradicate the inequalities of the past and provide learners with a smoother transition from Grade 12 to the realm of higher education (Van Dyk & Weideman 2004a; Van der Slik & Weideman 2007). The type of discourse that they will encounter at tertiary level is of a highly typical nature (Patterson & Weideman 2013) and most students are ill prepared to cope with the academic and literacy demands of higher learning. The same would apply to the high level ability needed to be an articulate citizen and participant in public and ethical debates.

When assessing advanced language ability, care must be taken where readers are expected to make pragmatic inferences, i.e. where they have to "combine information from the text with knowledge from outside the text" (Hughes 2003: 139). To prevent biased examination tasks all learners should ideally have access to the same outside knowledge.

(ii) Interpretation of graphic and visual texts

This section of the curriculum needs further consideration. A number of tasks can be identified in Table 5 that are not language-related *per se* and may be considered to fall within the discipline of Communication Science. The desirability of including such task specifications in language-specific examinations is debatable and will be deliberated in future reports.

Learners should be able to:

- Examine how layout is a key aspect of popular websites
- Examine how advertisers get attention
- Examine how movement and colour play key roles in persuading the reader to move to other sites
- Understanding how language and images reflect and shape values and attitudes
- Identifying images that are sexist, racist, ageist or stereotyped
- Investigate the impact of use of font types and sizes, headings and captions
- Analyse, interpret, evaluate and respond to cartoons/comic strips

**Table 5: Tasks required for the reading and interpreting of visual texts
(Department of Basic Education 2012: 23)**

The use of language in combination with graphic information should be the focus of a language examination, and not aspects such as camera angle or font type. The latter have less to do with the assessment of language ability than with understanding a different kind of communication.

(iii) Vocabulary development and language use

In line with communicative language teaching all vocabulary items and aspects of language use are to be embedded in authentic texts and the emphasis should be on the reasons underlying the choice of words and figures of speech rather than merely identifying these. For example, learners should be able to explain the use of figurative language and rhetorical devices in a text. Once again caution should be taken not to transform the assessment of knowledge of vocabulary and language use into the assessment of productive or writing ability, unless one is able to adopt a skills-neutral approach. A full list of aspects to be covered on the teaching and assessment side is included in Appendix B.

(iv) Sentence structures and the organisation of texts

Although these are listed under Reading and Viewing, CAPS advises incorporating such tasks in the "writing lessons" (p. 24), i.e. ensuring that learners can employ the listed language structures and conventions in their writing. Examples from this section are listed in Table 6 as illustration. The complete list can be reviewed in Appendix C.

Learners must be able to identify, explain and analyse the following language structures and conventions in texts: • Transition words/conjunctions • Abbreviations and acronyms • Verb forms and auxiliaries expressing tense and mood • Simple, compound, complex, and compound complex sentences using clauses, phrases and conjunctions Learners must be able to analyse the structure/organization of texts across the curriculum: • Chronological/sequential order • Explanation • Cause and effect • Classification paragraph • Description paragraph • Evaluation paragraph • Definition paragraph

Table 6: Examples of what learners should understand in terms of language structures and text organisation

The language testing literature provides several examples of task types that can be used to assess this part of the reading curriculum without requiring learners to produce written text, something that could alter the nature of the ability being measured (cf. Davidson & Lynch 2002, Hughes 2003, Weir 2005).

A number of features of literary texts are also discussed on pages 25-29 of CAPS, as part of the section on reading and viewing. These will not be dealt with separately at this point, since literature forms part of the field of aesthetic discourse that we have already referred to above. The same observation, of the curriculum specifying both a differentiated and generic ability, is applicable. However, since aesthetic discourse is also a separate field, with its own content knowledge, it should preferably be discussed in its own section in CAPS; it does, after all, currently have its own exam paper.

Writing and presenting

A process approach to writing is adopted in which learners are required to demonstrate their knowledge of different structures and features of text types, sentence and paragraph conventions, and ability to use punctuation (Department of Basic Education 2011: 30). Apart from the planning, pre-writing, drafting and revising stages of writing, learners should display a number of general abilities such as those listed below in Table 7. These should form part of the assessment rubrics used to evaluate writing ability. The detailed list of abilities is provided in Appendix D.

Learners should be able to:
- Use main and supporting ideas effectively from the planning process
- Take into account purpose, audience, topic and genre
- Use appropriate words, phrases and expressions so that the writing is clear and vivid
- Display an identifiable voice and style in keeping with the purpose of the writing.
- Demonstrate own point of view supported by values, beliefs and experiences
- Use information from other texts to substantiate arguments
- Show knowledge of cohesive ties
- Use active and passive voice
- Write different parts of a paragraph, including introductory, supporting and concluding sentences
- Write different kinds of paragraphs (sequential, cause and effect, procedural, comparisons/contrasts, introductory and concluding paragraphs)
- Write texts that are coherent using conjunctions and transitional words and phrases

Table 7: A selection of writing abilities to be assessed

In addition to the above, learners are required to be able to produce a range of text types requiring particular formats and features within specific fields of discourse. Two broad categories of writing are mentioned: essays and transactional texts. Table 8 indicates the different essay types. The detailed specifications for each will not be discussed at this point.

Narrative
Descriptive
Argumentative
Discursive
Reflective
Literary

Table 8: Essay types which learners should be able to produce

The desirability of including all of the above in the examination papers is to be questioned, since narrative and descriptive essays require much more than language knowledge and are specialised fields of writing in which other constructs are involved. Another preliminary concern is that learners should be able to apply the same stages of the writing process set out in the curriculum within an examination context, if there is to be alignment between the curriculum and assessment and a degree of authenticity in the execution of such a task type. Most essays require research and are not produced in a vacuum. This aspect will be examined in detail as part of the analysis of the writing components of the Home Language papers.

Not all of the transactional text types are suitable for inclusion in an examination paper either, especially those that require research or additional knowledge of a topic. Table 9 shows the kinds of texts that learners are expected to produce.

Official and formal letters
Friendly and informal letters
Texts related to meetings (agendas, minutes, memoranda)
Speeches, dialogues and interviews
Formal and informal reports
Reviews (books, films, etc.)
Newspaper and magazine articles
Curriculum vitae
Obituaries

Table 9: Transactional texts which learners should be able to produce

Of the above-mentioned only the first two types of transactional texts (formal and informal letters) seem to be suitable for inclusion in an examination paper. Texts related to meetings should be based on authentic situations to be of any real value or they will lack context validity (Weir 2005: 56). CAPS stipulates that the writing of speeches, dialogues and interviews should not be done in isolation as purely writing exercises and would make the inclusion of these in an examination context unpractical. Reports, reviews and the writing of articles require substantial research and advance preparation and would also not be suitable for inclusion in a pressurised examination context. Moreover, research and journalism skills would be needed, thus causing the task to exceed the identified construct. These kinds of tasks could be accommodated well in the school-based assessment component where the different stages of process writing can be applied.

In summary, if one considers CAPS in its entirety, most of the assessment standards appear to be in order for Home Language level. The curriculum is comprehensive and has already gone through several rounds of benchmarking and refinement (see the Umalusi reports of 2009 to 2012). However, in as much as the curriculum and assessment standards may help to organize what should happen in the classroom, they provide no guarantee of contributing towards the quality of education and assessment practices, or of ensuring equivalence across different language examinations. Without denigrating the importance of standards and curricula, Davies points out that the emphasis needs to be shifted from setting standards to ensuring accountability, which he defines simply as a "way of explaining that what has been done is appropriate and necessary" (Davis 2010: 484). This aspect of accountability in language teaching and assessment is directly related to defining the underlying construct and articulating it in the form of detailed specifications based on defensible theories of language and communicative competence.

Conclusions reached

From the afore-mentioned discussion of differentiated and generic abilities it is evident that language is a complex phenomenon incorporating many heterogeneous types of language, rather than a singularly identifiable object. Any language-related act occurs within a unique context that has a direct bearing on what kind of language is used. We can see that language has many levels, is dynamic and constantly changing[2]. This view of language is adequately reflected in CAPS both in the acknowledgement and representation of materially different lingual spheres or discourse types, as well as the generic abilities reflected in the kinds of tasks that learners are expected to execute in the sections on functional language usage and formal language structures and conventions. Taking all of the above into consideration, a proposed formulation of a general underlying construct for the Home Language examination papers would be the following:

> The assessment of a differentiated language ability in a number of discourse types involving typically different texts, and a generic ability incorporating task-based functional and formal aspects of language.

The conceptual framework and primary construct such as that proposed here enable us to devote our attention to the articulation of the construct in a selection of language papers by examining the task specifications reflected in the papers and marking memoranda, so as to be able to express an opinion on whether these are sufficiently representative of the curriculum and whether the same abilities are being measured across the language groups. Suggestions as to how to achieve greater equivalence between the respective language papers will also be made. Preliminary analyses reveal a lack of scalar equivalence (construct and measurement unit equivalence). The intention is to analyse (listed in alphabetical order) the Afrikaans, English, Sepedi, Sesotho and Swati Home Language papers covering the period 2008-2011 on the basis of a number of accepted language testing principles applicable to the validation of

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[2] The field of English language teaching is currently moving in a new direction with growing recognition of its role as an international language. Socioculturally sensitive pedagogies are being foregrounded along with a new appraisal of what constitutes the variety of standard English. This could influence facets of the English Home Language curriculum in the foreseeable future.

language examinations. The findings hereof will be covered in the ensuing reports, and will constitute the outcomes of research for a doctoral thesis.

In addition, it is proposed that in four separate further studies (two at doctoral, and two at master's level) we investigate designing a test of advanced general language ability that is equivalent across the HLs, and based on the assessment of the ability of candidates to handle the high-level, advanced language functions and forms also articulated in CAPS. These studies will initially be conducted in pilot form for five languages: English, Afrikaans, Sepedi, Swati and Sesotho. They will problematise the idea of equivalence and propose a theoretically defensible solution for ensuring the greatest possible measure of it.

The research will therefore have the benefit of ensuring equivalence in at least two critically important respects.

First, in proposing a number of possible alternatives for re-allocation of both the content and the weighting of marks for each paper, in order to reflect more adequately the differentiated language ability articulated in CAPS, it will propose ways of ensuring the greatest possible level of similarity across the various papers that constitute HL examinations.

Second, in developing equivalent tests of advanced general language ability across the HLs, it will provide us with a defensible empirical measure to compare performance on their assessment.

The research will constitute a validation study not only of the exit assessment, but also of the CAPS, and so provide additional useful information on its quality as a curriculum. We envisage that the proposals that are generated will significantly increase the number of assessment options and strategies open to future examiners, both by introducing a new component, and by suggesting new combinations of current components.

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Appendix A: Generic reading abilities in CAPS

Learners are required to develop the ability to:

- skim and scan text features and book parts
- make predictions
- work out the meaning of unfamiliar words and images
- make sense of the text
- make connections
- monitor comprehension
- ask and answer questions
- visualize
- infer
- read for main ideas
- attend to word choice and language structures
- use structure and language features to recognize text type
- make notes
- summarize main and supporting ideas[3]
- compare and contrast
- synthesize
- evaluate
- draw conclusions
- express own opinion
- reproduce the genre in own writing[4]
- distinguish between fact and opinion

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[3] These are actually writing tasks that require comprehension of a text passage.
[4] This is a writing task that requires more than the ability to read and understand a text.

Appendix B: Abilities to be assessed relating to vocabulary development and language use

Learners are required to develop the ability to:

- identify and explain the use of figurative language and rhetorical devices
- distinguish between denotation and connotation
- determine the meaning, spelling, pronunciation, syllabication and part of speech of unfamiliar words using reference books
- identify the meaning of common prefixes and suffixes
- use knowledge of prefixes, suffixes and common roots to determine the meaning of words and their connections to word families
- use textual context and cues to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words
- distinguish between multiple-meaning words in uncomplicated texts about concrete topics[5]
- recognise common allusions.[6]
- demonstrate an understanding of common phrases, proverbs and idiomatic language
- evaluate how words from various cultural origins have an impact on text[7]
- distinguish between commonly confused words: homophones, homonyms, homographs, synonyms
- retell a story or sentence using different words (synonyms and antonyms)[8]
- use one word for a phrase
- use collocations

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[5] Exactly what is meant by 'uncomplicated' and 'concrete' is not clear, nor the reason for the specification of texts. Surely polysemes occur in a variety of texts on all kinds of topics of varying degrees of difficulty.

[6] This may require additional knowledge and could be biased towards some learners.

[7] This is specialised sociolinguistic knowledge and would prejudice certain learners.

[8] This would involve a form of writing or speaking.

Appendix C: The assessment of sentence structures and the organisation of texts

Learners must be able to identify, explain and analyse the following language structures and conventions in texts:

- transition words/conjunctions
- abbreviations and acronyms
- Verb forms and auxiliaries expressing tense and mood
- simple, compound, complex, and compound complex sentences using clauses, phrases and conjunctions
- active and passive voice
- direct and indirect speech
- correct word order
- concord, articles, infinitives, copulatives, prepositions
- punctuation

Learners must be able to analyse the structure/organization of texts across the curriculum and related transitional words/signal words:

- chronological/sequential order
- explanation
- cause and effect
- procedure
- comparison/contrast
- order of importance
- spatial order
- choice paragraph
- classification paragraph
- description paragraph
- evaluation paragraph
- definition paragraph
- expositions
- reports
- concluding paragraph

Appendix D: General writing abilities to be assessed

Learners should be able to:

- use main and supporting ideas effectively from the planning process
- take into account purpose, audience, topic and genre
- use appropriate words, phrases and expressions so that the writing is clear and vivid
- display an identifiable voice and style in keeping with the purpose of the writing.
- demonstrate own point of view supported by values, beliefs and experiences
- use information from other texts to substantiate arguments
- write in such a way that there is no ambiguity of meaning, redundancy or inappropriate language
- use punctuation, spelling and grammar correctly
- use appropriate register, style and voice
- construct a variety of sentences of different lengths and complexity using parts of speech appropriately
- show knowledge of cohesive ties
- use active and passive voice
- use direct and indirect speech
- use affirmatives and negatives
- display knowledge of verbs, tenses and moods
- use interrogatives
- write different parts of a paragraph, including introductory, supporting and concluding sentences
- write different kinds of paragraphs (sequential, cause and effect, procedural, comparisons/contrasts, introductory and concluding paragraphs)
- write texts that are coherent using conjunctions and transitional words and phrases