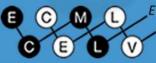ECML Conference "Empowering Language Professionals",
Graz, 1st October 2011

Task-Based Language Testing at University (GULT)

Johann Fischer (University of Göttingen / DE) –
project coordinator

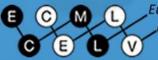Diana Ioniţa (University of Bucharest / RO) –
project participant

European Centre for Modern Languages
Centre européen pour les langues vivantes
Europäisches Fremdsprachenzentrum

Our Context:

- **university LSP testing**
- **end-of-course tests, prochievement tests**
- **i.e. linked to syllabus**
- **tests / exams developed by LC**
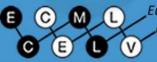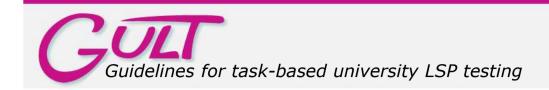
Structure of existing language tests:

1. **Reading:** *"Please read the text and answer the questions!"*
2. **Listening:** *"Please listen to the text and answer the questions!"*
3. **Writing:** *"Please write an essay about …"*
4. **Speaking:** *"Please explain what you think about…" / "Present your ideas about…" / "Imagine you are… and…"*

Structure of existing language tests:

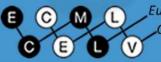## *Authenticity???*

Validity???

Objectivity???

Relevance???

What is important in communication?:

- ✓ **to express personal ideas on a given topic**
- ✓ **to express needs and wishes**
- ✓ **to pass on information**
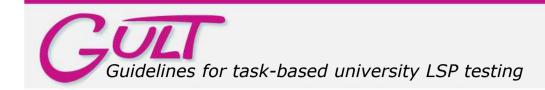
→ **speaking and writing**

Structure of existing language tests:

1. **Reading:** *"Please read the text and answer the questions!"* 😦

2. **Listening:** *"Please listen to the text and answer the questions!"* 😦

3. **Writing:** *"Please write an essay about …"* 😐

4. **Speaking:** *"Please explain what you think about…" / "Present your ideas about…" / "Imagine you are… and…"* 😐
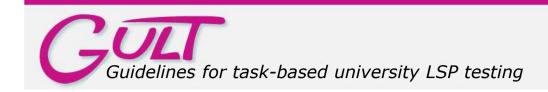
An alternative?:
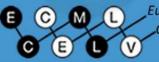
communicative approach
and
task-based approach

What is GULT?:

"Development of **G**uidelines for Task-Based **U**niversity **L**anguage **T**esting at levels B2 / C1"

Project financed by ECML in Graz

3rd Medium-Term Programme 2008-2011

European Centre for Modern Languages
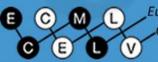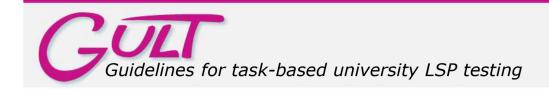Centre européen pour les langues vivantes
Europäisches Fremdsprachenzentrum

The Issue:

How to design exams so that they really measure the candidates' linguistic competence, i.e. concretely show how well candidates can communicate in real-life situations?
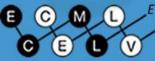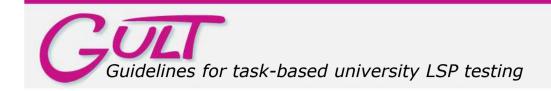
Background:

UNIcert® (DE)

UNIcert® LUCE (CZ/SK)

CLES (FR)

LAAKEA Project (FI)

European Centre for Modern Languages
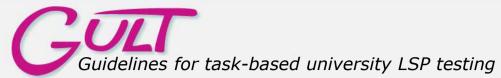Centre européen pour les langues vivantes
Europäisches Fremdsprachenzentrum

Project team:

Johann Fischer, Universität Göttingen (DE)

Catherine Chouissa, Université de Strasbourg (FR)

Stefania Dugovičová, Comenius University Bratislava (SK)

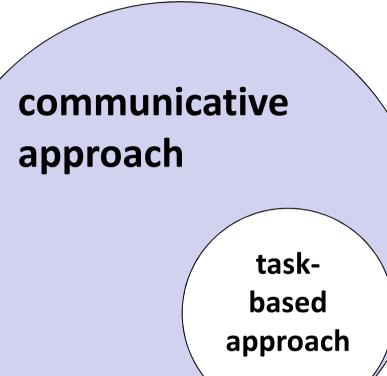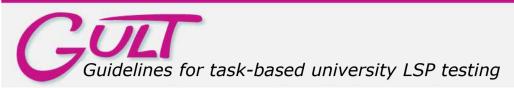Anu Virkkunen-Fullenwider, University of Helsinki (FI)

Communicative approach and task-based approach:
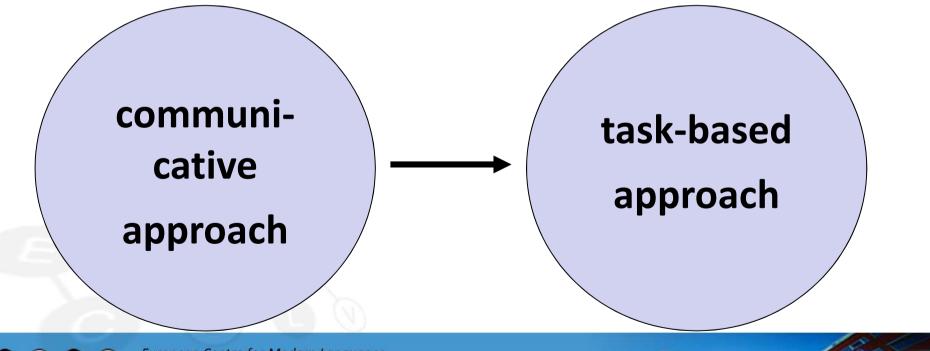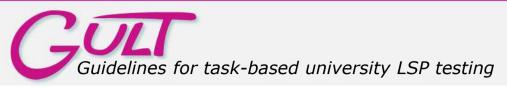
GULT Network Meeting, Graz 2011
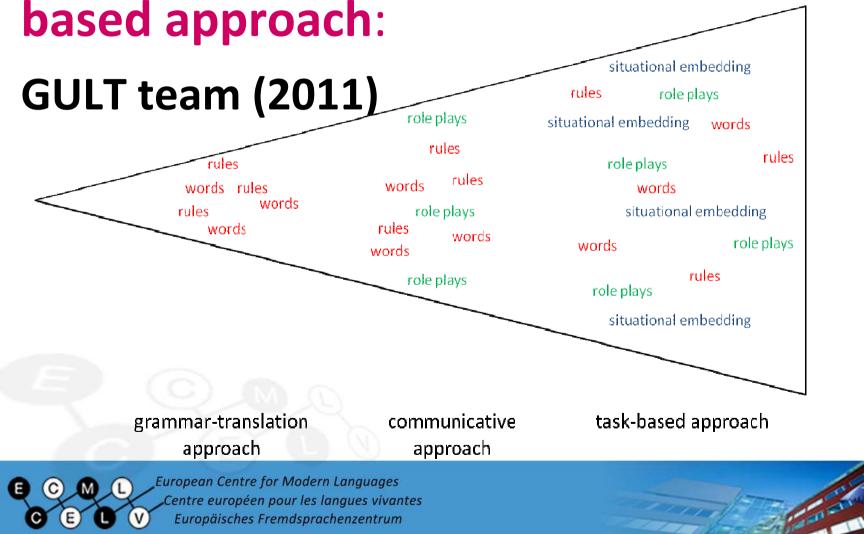
communicative approach

task-based approach

Communicative approach and task-based approach:

Bourguignon (2006) : la « communic-action »

communi-cative approach → **task-based approach**

Communicative approach and task-based approach:

GULT team (2011)

situational embedding

rules   role plays

situational embedding   words

role plays

rules

rules   role plays   rules

words

rules   words

words   rules

situational embedding

rules   words

role plays

rules   words

role plays

words   role plays

words   role plays

rules   words

role plays

role plays   rules
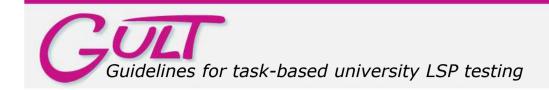
situational embedding

grammar-translation approach
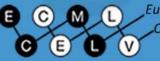
communicative approach

task-based approach

What is a task?:

Skehan (2003: 3):

- "A task is an activity which requires learners to use language, with **emphasis on meaning**, **to attain an objective**."
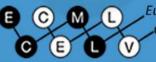
What is a task?:

Skehan (1996: 20):

- "Tasks [...] are activities which have meaning as their primary focus. Success in tasks is evaluated in terms of **achievement of an outcome**, and tasks generally bear some **resemblance to real-life language use**. So task-based instruction takes a fairly strong view of communicative language teaching."
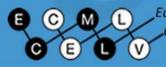
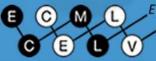| task-based ⟶	action-based
aufgabenorientiert ⟶	*handlungsorientiert*
entrée par les tâches ⟶	*perspective actionnelle / approche actionnelle*
↑ **Input** **teacher's view** *Perspektive der Lehrkraft* *perspective de l'enseignant*	↑ **Output** **learner's view** *Perspektive des Lerners* *perspective de l'apprenant*

example:

Cambridge exam CAE
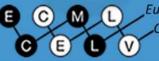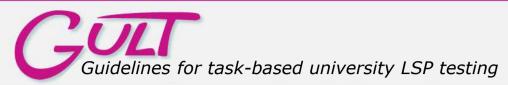
example:

successful communication???

communicative approach –

task-based approach:

"Task-based language learning and testing can best be seen as a more focused and developed out-growth of the communicative approach to teaching languages. The hallmarks of the communicative approach include a **focus on communicating meaning**, **using authentic materials**, **integrating skills**, and **centring instruction on the students** and **their communicative needs**."   (Hope 2011)
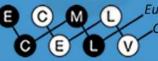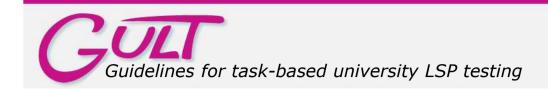
example:

Needs of the candidates???

Testing conference, Modena, Dec. 2010:

James Purpura:

"Meaningful Testing"
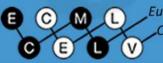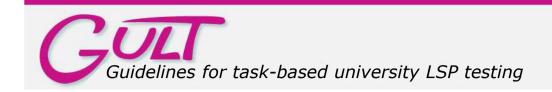
The task-based approach:

➢ puts the learner at the centre of teaching / learning / testing

➢ i.e. his or her needs, knowledge, competences, language skills

➢ asks the learner to complete an (authentic) task, using his/her competences, language skills, but also his/her knowledge
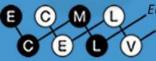
Task-based approaches:

- action-oriented: project, global simulation, case study
- problem-based: case study

"Task-based testing"?:

- **interactionalist perspective**, i.e. the exam focuses on the interaction in a communication context

- task as an input

- assessment criteria: content; pragmatic, (socio-) linguistic and paralinguistic competence
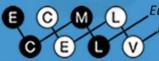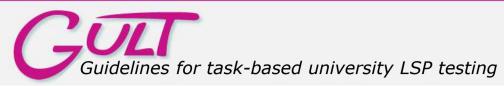
Aim:

focus on competences (CEFR) instead of concentrating on errors

→**Increase objectivity, validity and reliability, and also relevance and transparency**

→**need: competence-oriented evaluation grids**

Task-based assessment –

performance-based assessment

Wigglesworth (2008):

However, Brown, Hudson, Norris and Bonk (2002) define task-based language testing as <u>a subset of performance based language testing</u>, clearly distinguishing between performance based testings, in which tasks are <u>merely vehicles for eliciting language samples for rating</u>, and task-based performance assessments in which <u>tasks are used to elicit language</u> to reflect the kind of <u>real world activities</u> learners will be expected to perform, and in which the focus is on <u>interpreting the learners' abilities to use language to perform such tasks in the real world</u>.
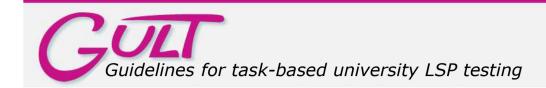
Task-based assessment –

performance-based assessment

Wigglesworth (2008):

For test candidates, this trend toward task and performance based assessment means that they are <u>evaluated on a much greater range of language skills</u> than those traditionally measured by the more discrete, paper and pencilbased tests. [...] The more communicative approaches to language learning and teaching have been necessitated by <u>the need to assess language in use, rather than language as object</u>.
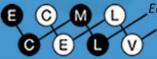
European Centre for Modern Languages
Centre européen pour les langues vivantes
Europäisches Fremdsprachenzentrum

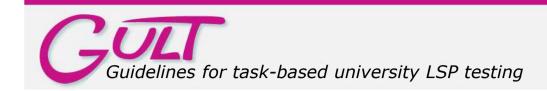# GULT exam:
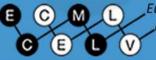
overall task

+

several build-up tasks

GULT construct:

- how well learners can express themselves in a real-life situation in their studies or their future workplace, using (where appropriate) LSP language corresponding to the subject area in question

- assessing aspects of content, pragmatic competence, linguistic competence and paralinguistic competence

... ...

GULT construct:

… …

- criterion-referenced test (and not a norm-referenced test)

- criteria are decided upon by test developers or institution for every test and should be in line with the CEFR criteria / categories

Task-based approaches stimulate:

- **language competence in all four skills**

but also:

- **group work**

- **problem solving skills**

- **presentation skills**

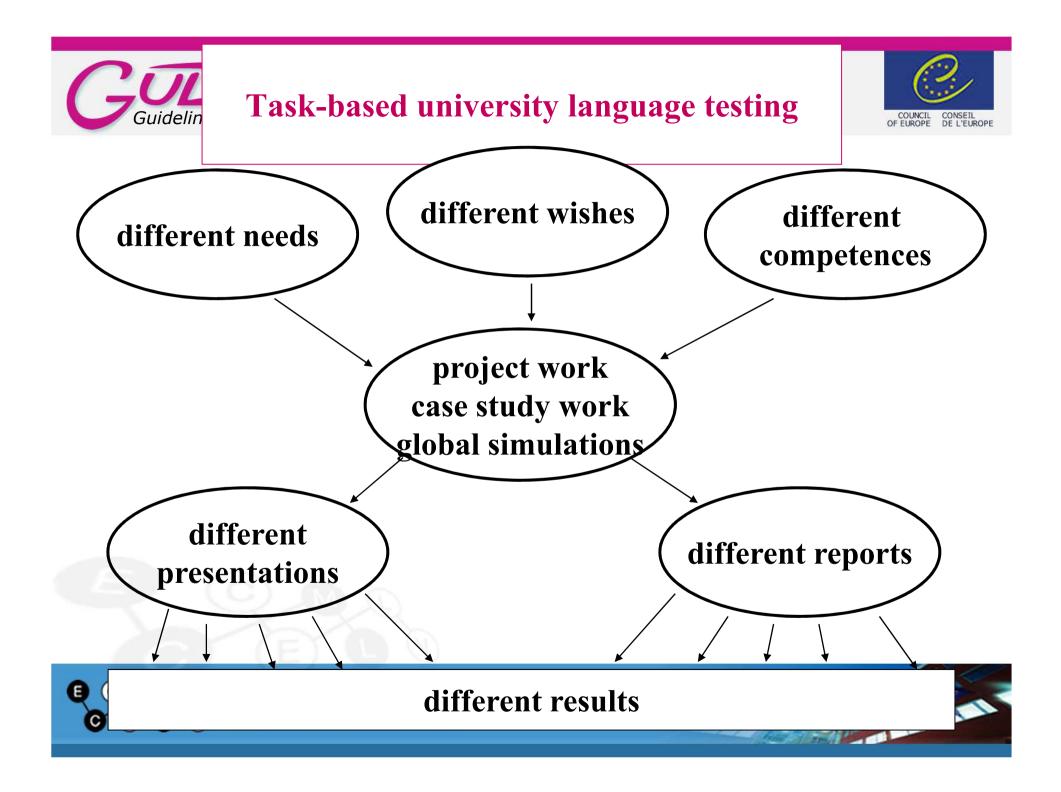- **discussion skills**

Task-based approaches stimulate:

...

- *negotiation skills*
- *making compromises*
- *intercultural competence in an international setting*
- *study skills / "transferable skills"*
- *motivation of the learner*

Task-based university language testing

Teaching vs. Assessment:

frequently:

Task-based language teaching

↕

"traditional" language exam

Integration into syllabus:

- task-based language exams as end-of-course exams

- task-based language exams as proficiency exams

End-of-course exams:
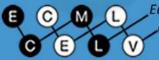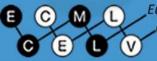
- **activities integrated into global simulation**
  - *to assess speaking*
  - *to assess writing*
- **case study work to assess speaking**
- **case study work to assess writing**
- **case study work to assess reading**
- **case study work to assess listening**

Structure of UNIcert exam:

- **Introduction to task: presentation of the topic**
- **Listening and reading – 90 min**
- **Case study work (pair / team work) – 60 + 30 min**
- **Writing – 90 min**
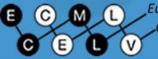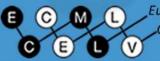- **Speaking – 30 min per candidate**

Structure of UNIcert exam:

- **Introduction to task: presentation of _the topic_**
- **Listening and reading – 90 min**
- **_Case study work_ (pair / team work) – 60 + 30 min**
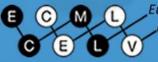- **Writing – 90 min**
- **Speaking – 30 min per candidate**

What is different?:

- **Listening and reading have a new function:**

  no longer: "Understand for the sake of understanding" ("Please answer the questions!")

  but: understanding of the text with a clear aim in mind, i.e. managing the task

- **speaking and writing:**

  presentation of a specific product in a concrete context

What is different?:

- **use of authentic resources:**

  preparation for situation in future professional life, (training and testing) competence in using resources

→ **There is a purpose in completing the exam, there is a concrete function to the individual tasks, embedded in the overall task**

Evaluation:

- **Development of assessment grids based on the CEFR and the *Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the CEFR* for evaluating the productive skills**

Evaluation:
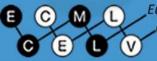
Speaking:

- content / pragmatic competence

- discussion skills

- linguistic competence

- non-verbal aspects and presentation skills

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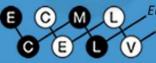Europäisches Fremdsprachenzentrum

Evaluation:

Writing:

- content *(integrity of text, correctness, relevance, originality / substance)*

- pragmatic competence *(functionality, text organisation / coherence / cohesion)*

- linguistic competence *(linguistic correctness, i.e. grammar, vocabulary, spelling / punctuation; language variety in grammar and vocabulary; style / register)*

Diana IONIȚA

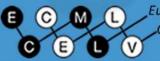(University of Bucharest)

A Case Study

My contribution (D. Ionița) to this project during the two workshops that I have attended relied in in applying the project principles to our students' specific domain of interest, at the University of Bucharest.

Benefits and novelty

- **The beauty of this type of tests is that it corresponds to a real-life situation in the workplace where one might be asked to launch a project or solve a problem, to analyse a case, to gather all the relevant information, to make up a portfolio and then to write a report .**

- **To sum up, the communicative competence is assessed by putting the candidates in an authentic situation within a social context.**
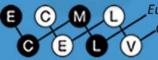
CASE STUDY

- **We have used all the principles postulated by the GULT project and we have applied them to the final BA exam taken by our students from the Applied Modern Languages Department, University of Bucharest.**
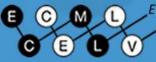
CASE STUDY

- **The steps:**
- **to choose a domain and then to draw up a paper with the following contents:**

    a) description of that domain and solve a problem;

    b) a bilingual terminology glossary – 80 terms in English / Spanish / German / Russian / Italian / Croatian and 80 terms in Romanian,

    c) a parallel between the terms in the two languages regarding one-to-one correspondences, loans, etc;

    d) references

CASE STUDY

- **the students decide upon the topic and upon the most appropriate sources (videos, dictionaries, magazines, books, web-sites, journals);**

- **the students write the paper according to the above-mentioned structure;**

- **they hand in the paper 10 days in advance for a scientific board to check if they complied with the copy-right regulations;**

- **the students present orally their paper, using the PPT device, in front of three board members who assess both the paper and the oral presentation and give the final mark, according to a standardised evaluation grid.**
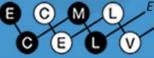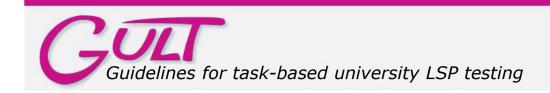
CASE STUDY

- **Each student has a scientific advisor – one of the Applied Modern Languages Department, who approves on the topic, the contents, selection of information, data processing, etc. The students regularly report to their coordinator and during the end-of-semester exams their receptive skills are evaluated.**

- **The final evaluation grid focuses on the students' communicative competence, lexicology, semantics and pragmatics, as well as the accuracy of the scientific content and the presentation skills.**
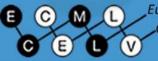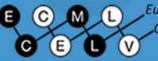
CASE STUDY

- **We present one model of diploma paper following the GULT project guidelines.**

- **The student (Alexandra Panait) chose as topic: "An English – Romanian Glossary On Laparoscopic Surgery"**

CASE STUDY

- **The team: the student herself, the English teacher, and the expert in her domain, a Romanian surgeon.**

- **The first steps – reading and listening comprehension – were tested throughout the last year of study – during the English language seminars and test papers – regarding the type of information the student wanted to choose: websites, audio files, magazines, newspapers and specialised books.**
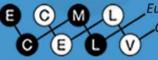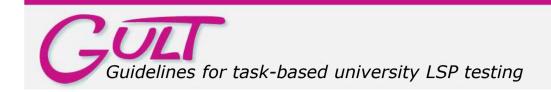
CASE STUDY

- **The next step, the writing competence, had as major outcome the paper proper, especially the bilingual glossary and a parallel between the same terms in English and Romanian from the linguistic point of view.**

- **The student not only presented the main data about the domain, emphasizing the novelty and the benefits of such a procedure, but she was able to decide upon the type of information to select, the sources to focus on, the structure the paper, the selection of terms included in the terminology glossary.**
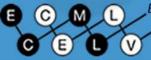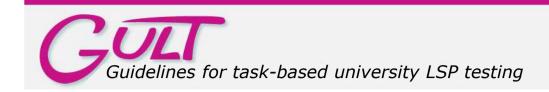
CASE STUDY

Firstly, the student succeeded in outlining the advantages and the disadvantages of this new procedure in the medical field:

Advantages

- Smaller incisions ➔ no scars;
- Tiny details that can be seen only with the special camera ➔ better view of the operative field;
- Reduced haemorrhaging ➔ no need of blood transfusions;
- Microbial contamination is reduced due to closed space ➔ no infections;
- Minimum complications incidence (almost zero) ➔ hi-fi technique;
- Reduced postoperative care ➔ less pain ➔ less medication;
- Hospitalization time is reduced ➔ efficiency;
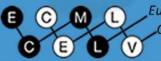- Shorter recovery time ➔ fast integration in the society, etc.

CASE STUDY

Disadvantages

- Need to purchase and maintain high technology equipment ➔ more expensive than traditional surgery;

- Training is needed ➔ technical expertise;

- Insufflation may cause postoperative pain, gas embolus, tension pneumothorax ➔ risks are to be accepted before the surgery;

- The execution time needed for the intervention is longer than in laparotomy ➔ intervention is thorough.
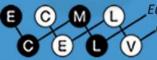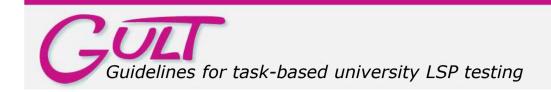
CASE STUDY

- **the student provided a reliable bilingual glossary, as a result of her work of research and by combining the theoretical research results with the linguistic information.**

CASE STUDY

Each term is analysed according to a list of semantic and lexical fields, as in the following example: Laparoscopic surgery

- **SOURCE: www.laparoscopy.net**
- **I.D. LANGUAGE: English, British**
- **I.D. COUNTRY: U.S.A., U.K.**
- **STANDARD DEFINITION: a specialized technique for performing surgery**
- **STANDARD DEFINITION SOURCE: http://www.fascrs.org/patients/treatments_and_screenings/laparoscopic_surgery/**
- **SPECIFIC DEFINITION: Laparoscopic surgery, also called minimally invasive surgery (MIS), keyhole surgery is a modern surgical technique in which operations in the abdomen are performed through small incisions (usually 0.5-1.5cm) as compared to larger incisions needed in traditional surgical procedures.**
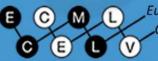- **SPECIFIC DEFINITION SOURCE: www.laparoscopy.net**
- **NOTA BENE: Gk.** *lapara* **flank +** *scope;* **from fr.** *laparoscopié*
- **NOTA BENE SOURCE: Oxford English Reference Dictionary,**

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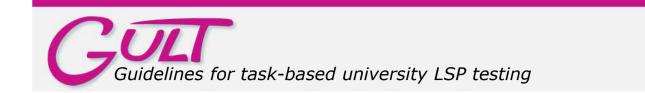
CASE STUDY

- **The last step was the oral presentation, meant to check the speaking skills. The tool used was the PPT presentation. The students focused on the main sections of the contents, emphasized the key concepts as well as the troublesome cases regarding the terms analysis and showed a conceptual map, containing the main terms of the glossary :**
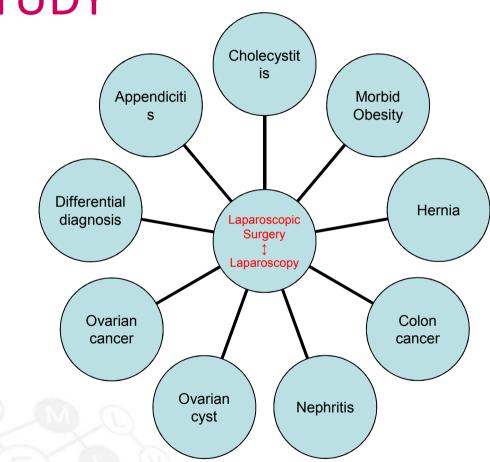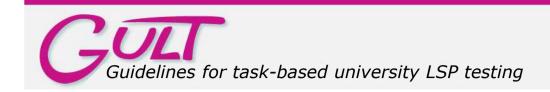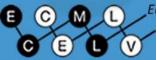
CASE STUDY

CASE STUDY

- **The holistic dimension of this type of test becomes obvious when we look at our evaluation grid**
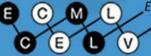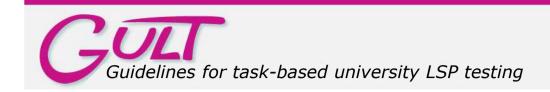
EVALUATION GRID

- **The importance of the topic for the selected domain**
- **The theoretical input**
- **Paper structure (cohesion, coherence, etc)**
- **Selection and interpretation of the resources**
- **Critical interpretation and problem solving skills**
- **The application of the theoretical information – case studies**
- **Orginality and creativity**
- **Presentation skills (can interact spontaneously, fluently and clearly)**
- **Style (coherence, fluency, accuracy)**
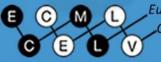- **Masters specialised vocabulary and correct syntax structures**

CONCLUSIONS

The <u>complexity</u> of this type of test is clear:

- **it covers the whole last year of study, the receptive skills are evaluated throughout the year in the semester exams;**

- **the productive skills are the subject matter of the final stage;**

- **the objectivity of the scores is ensured by the presence of three members in the board as well as by the evaluation grid.**
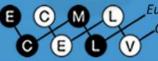
CONCLUSIONS

- **The assessors as well as the students benefited from the holistic approach to the four skills assessment, the focus on the authentic sources as well as on the productive skills, with a final outcome as a specific product in a concrete professional context.**
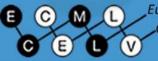
Results of piloting the GULT approach:

Reactions and feedback from:

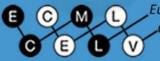- **students,**
- **teachers / evaluators,**
- **institutions**

Student reactions:

- the students are less worried during exam (visible) (social component)

- candidates concentrate (more) on task

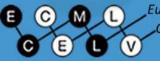- students are more involved in topic / content (authenticity, relevance)

... ...

Student reactions:

… …

- integration of listening and reading in speaking part of exam by candidates

- students show better results

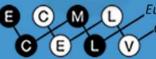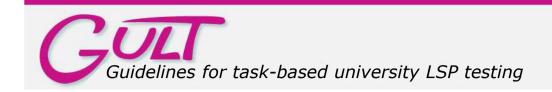- students with good language competence can better show their skills (reading and writing)

Student feedback:

- negative initial reaction, but happier afterwards
- less stress because of group work and preparation phase
- less stress because candidates are working on authentic problem (strong involvement in topic)
- surprise about variety of possible solutions
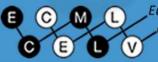- interesting discussions

Examiners' reactions:

- stronger involvement in and concentration on topic of exam → increase of interest
- initially more work in test development
- initially more correction work
- more active role of 2nd marker in discussion

→ increased interaction with candidates in oral exam

Examiners' feedback:

- atmosphere more relaxed: you don't feel students' stress
- you forget about the exam situation
- surprised how animated the discussions are
- surprised that examiners have to stop candidates ("unfortunately the exam is over and we have to stop here")
- "you can see how competent the students are in managing a situation linguistically"
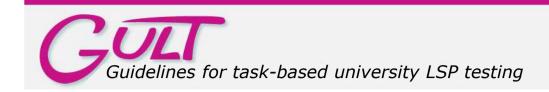
Reactions from institutions:

- hesitant reactions towards task-based approaches in teaching (problem: exam structure)

- but very positive about task-based testing

- strong demand for professional development courses

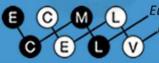- adoption of task-based approach by UNIcert system

Benefits:

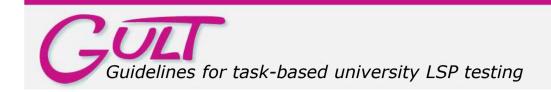➢ **increase of motivation and involvement (candidates and examiners)**

➢ **improved face validity**

➢ **possibly also higher content validity, concurrent validity, consequential validity**
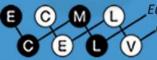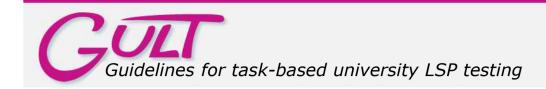
Criticism:

"Why testing the receptive skills?"
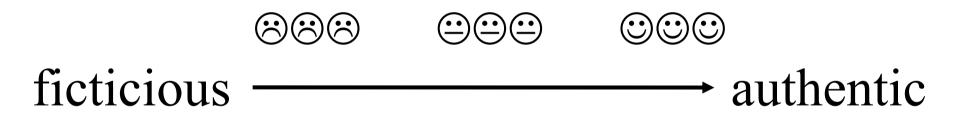**(key words: authenticity, integrative tests)**
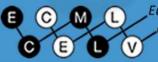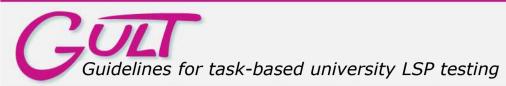
→ compromise, comparability

Authenticity:

☹☹☹   😐😐😐   ☺☺☺
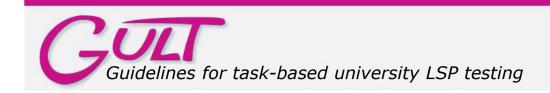
ficticious ⟶ authentic

communicative approach –
task-based approach:

"Task-based language learning and testing can best be seen as a more focused and developed out-growth of the communicative approach to teaching languages. The hallmarks of the communicative approach include a focus on communicating meaning, using authentic materials, integrating skills, and centring instruction on the students and their communicative needs.

What the task-based approach adds is an emphasis on embedding holistic communicative acts into a specific context and situation, with a specific aim that mirrors the actual or future communicative aims of the learner." (Hope 2011)

"Why is it worth it?":

- **learner-oriented**
- **closer to real-life**
- **increased authenticity**
- **integration of transferable skills**
- **positive reaction of test-takers and examiners**
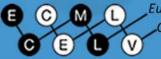- **(???) predicting future performance of candidates in real-life (???)**

Perspectives:

- **positive feedback**
- **integration into UNIcert framework**
- **need for professional development courses**
- **future cooperation: e.g. developping assessment grids**
- **follow-up projects (?)**

GULT project website:

http://gult.ecml.at/

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