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## **A CONCISE ANALYSIS OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE EXAMINATION (YDS) IN TURKEY AND ITS POSSIBLE WASHBACK EFFECTS**

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## A CONCISE ANALYSIS OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE EXAMINATION (YDS) IN TURKEY AND ITS POSSIBLE WASHBACK EFFECTS

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### Abstract

In this paper, some basic information about the Foreign Language Examination (YDS) is presented before the construct of the test is analysed in respect of assessing language proficiency. Then, the issues such as reliability and validity of the test are briefly addressed, and both current and possible outcomes of YDS are discussed. Finally, some suggestions for the future direction are presented as the necessity of using computer/internet assistance and encompassing more areas of language knowledge and language skills are highlighted. While this paper provides a ground for future studies to examine YDS, it is strongly emphasized that further and detailed research with empirical data on the test is necessary in order to reveal a much more accurate examination.

*Keywords:* YDS, foreign language examination, language proficiency, language assessment

### 1. Introduction

As English becomes a primary means of international communication in today's world, the concepts and processes of English language instruction and assessment have been receiving great attention of researchers, practitioners and language policy makers. Like language learning and teaching paradigms, trends in language assessment have also 'followed the changing winds and shifting sands of methodology' in language education (Brown, 2007). That is, both the process of language instruction and the tenets of language assessment are consistently influenced by the communicative and integrative approaches and effective teaching and learning strategies in language education. As an important part of language assessment, assessing English language proficiency has also gained in popularity both at national and international levels. At the international level, a number of universities, companies and institutions regard large-scale English language proficiency tests such as the *Test of English as a Foreign Language* (TOEFL), the *International English Language Testing System* (IELTS) and/or *Pearson Test of English Academic* (PTE Academic) as valid and accurate assessment tools that display test takers' English language proficiency level. These tests have a significant role in test takers' lives since they assess test takers' overall language proficiency and the results are often used for 'making critical decisions about test takers' (Uysal, 2009, p.314) such as applying for an academic degree, professional and institutional positions and even for immigration.

At national level, standardized tests for language proficiency are generally developed and administrated by national corporations or government agencies. For example, the *General English Proficiency Test* (GEPT) in Taiwan is designed by the Language Training and Testing Center, a foundation registered with Taiwan's Ministry of Education, to measure test takers' English language abilities and to promote English language learning as a life-long

process<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, in Turkey, the *Foreign Language Examination* (Yabancı Dil Bilgisi Seviye Tespit Sınavı; hereafter YDS) is developed and administrated by a governmental institution called Assessment, Selection and Placement Centre (Ölçme, Seçme ve Yerleştirme Merkezi; hereafter OSYM) in order to assess test takers' foreign language proficiency. The purpose of this paper is to provide a rather descriptive and concise analysis of YDS as the most favoured national high-stakes language examination in Turkey. Here, the construct of the test is analysed in the light of the 'language knowledge' dimension of the language use framework illustrated by Bachman and Palmer (1996).

### 1.1. The Foreign Language Examination (YDS) in Turkey

OSYM was administrating two different language proficiency tests: the *Foreign Language Examination for Civil Servants* (Kamu Personeli Yabancı Dil Seviye Tespit Sınavı, KPDS) and the *Inter-University Foreign Language Examination* (Üniversitelerarası Kurul Yabancı Dil Sınavı, UDS) until 2013. In January 2013, OSYM issued a press release announcing that it will not continue offering these two proficiency tests (i.e., KPDS and UDS), but administrate only the *Foreign Language Examination* (YDS) to measure test takers' English language proficiency levels<sup>2</sup>. YDS, which is usually taken by civil servants, military officers, academics and graduate students, takes place biannually (as in spring and autumn). While the test in spring is designed in more than twenty languages (e.g., Chinese, English, French, Greek, German, Japanese, Persian and Spanish), the one in autumn includes only Arabic, English, French, German and Russian. In Arabic, Bulgarian, English, French, Greek, German, Italian, Persian, Russian and Spanish, the test is in a multiple-choice format consisting of 80 questions in total about vocabulary knowledge, grammar knowledge, translation and reading comprehension. In other languages, e.g., Armenian, Chinese, Danish, Greek, Japanese and Korean, the test is solely in the form of language translation (i.e., from Turkish to the chosen language and vice versa) and evaluated by an academic jury in OSYM. The reason why the test is administrated in two different formats for different languages might be about technical considerations such as practicality and reliability in the development and application of the test in accordance with the number of test takers. In both formats, test takers are given two and a half hours (150 minutes) to complete the test. As for the evaluation in the multiple-choice test format, each correct answer of the test takers is given 1.25 point. At the end, test-takers' proficiency levels are decided according to their final scores on the scale of zero to one hundred (see Table 1). For this particular paper, the construct of the English version of YDS (hereafter, YDS-English) is chosen to be examined.

<b>Scores</b>	100-90	89-80	79-70	69-60	59-50
<b>Levels</b>	A	B	C	D	E

Table 1: YDS scores and proficiency levels

The equivalence between the English language exam scores obtained from YDS-English and the exam scores obtained from other English language tests (e.g., TOEFL, PTE-Academic) is decided by OSYM<sup>3</sup>. According to OSYM, the equivalence between the internationally recognized English language tests and YDS-English, which does not attempt

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.lttc.ntu.edu.tw/E\\_LTTC/E\\_GEPT.htm](http://www.lttc.ntu.edu.tw/E_LTTC/E_GEPT.htm). Retrieved on 23 April 2016.

<sup>2</sup> <http://osym.gov.tr/belge/1-14909/basin-duyurusu-2013-yabanci-dil-bilgisi-seviye-belirlem-.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://dokuman.osym.gov.tr/pdfdokuman/2016/GENEL/EsdegerlikTablosu29012016.pdf>. Retrieved on 23 April 2016

to assess all language skills, is indicated in one way only since the former ones are expected to measure the ability to communicate in English across all four language skills (i.e., listening, writing, speaking and reading). That is, while TOEFL IBT total score 114 is equivalent to 95 (Level A) in YDS-English, the equivalence is not regarded valid and accurate in the other way around. Some examples of the equivalence are shown in Table 2.

TOEFL-IBT	→ YDS ←	PTE-Academic
120	100	90
114	95	87
108	90	84
102	85	81
96	80	78
90	75	75
84	70	71
78	65	67
72	60	55
66	55	50
60	50	45
54	45	38
48	40	30

Table 2: The equivalence between the exam scores from YDS-English and from other proficiency exams<sup>2</sup>

YDS-English measures test takers' proficiency level of English language, and the test is constructed of several sections, each of which attempts to assess various areas of language knowledge. These sections are, namely, fill-in-the-blanks and cloze tests, sentence completion, translation, reading comprehension, dialogue completion, paraphrasing/restatement, paragraph completion and finding the irrelevant sentence. According to the handbook prepared and circulated by OSYM, YDS-English adopts British English in terms of language usage and the questions in the test are prepared from the sources produced in inner-circle countries, where English is used as an official, native language (see Kachru, 1992) such as the USA, the UK and Canada (see OSYM, 2016).

### 1.2. Previous studies on YDS-English

It is possible to list few studies on YDS-English and/or on the similar language proficiency examinations administrated by OSYM such as KPDS and UDS. Since these tests have similar nature and constructs, previous studies on KPDS and UDS may provide useful implications for YDS-English as well. For instance, in his qualitative study, Özmen (2011) investigated the washback effects of UDS on prospective academics in Turkey and found out that the test had negative washback effects on several micro and macro level variables (e.g., negative effect on L2 competences, cognitive learning and in terms of course and materials expenses). Exploring academics' opinions about foreign language examinations (i.e., KPDS and UDS) and their language proficiency levels, Yavuzer and Göver (2012) conducted a questionnaire with 121 academic members in a state university in Turkey. Their study revealed that the participants perceived these tests as a barrier to further academic promotion and indicated the need to revise such language examinations to include all of the four basic language skills. In terms of language skills, Akpınar and Cakildere (2013) investigated the washback effects of KPDS and UDS via a survey on 103 academics' receptive and

productive language skills. In their study, both descriptive and statistical analyses of the survey revealed that ‘the most positively affected skill by these language tests’ was reading skill (p.88) and that ‘productive skills of speaking and writing and receptive skill of listening [were] totally neglected’ by the test takers as ‘these skills are not tested’ (p.89). In another study, Güleç (2013) investigated how academics studying for YDS conceptualised their success and failure attributions and their overall opinions about YDS. His study showed that academics had ‘positive belief towards learning English and taking YDS examination because of the importance of English for their academic career’ (p.8). According to the study, along with the ‘score’, it is possible to list other attributions such as ‘effort, ability, task difficulty and teacher influence’ for conceptualising success or failure in the language examination. Finally, Akın (2016) examined YDS in terms of some features of adult education and of language for specific purposes. The findings suggest that while originality of the questions and test takers’ familiarity with the test format can be listed as advantages of its application, not assessing the four basic language skills can be considered the downside of the test.

In this paper, the term of ‘language proficiency’ will be defined before the construct of YDS-English is examined within the *language knowledge* component of the framework presented by Bachman and Palmer (1996). Then, technical issues related to the test (e.g., reliability and validity) will be briefly addressed. At the end, the washback effects of the test will be discussed and some suggestions for the future direction will be presented. In this way, the present paper provides a ground for further and more detailed research on YDS-English.

## 2. Purpose and methodology of this study

As stated above, YDS is a language proficiency test administrated by OSYM in Turkey. Hughes (2003) defines proficiency tests as the tests that evaluate test takers’ abilities in a language, ‘regardless of any training they may have had in that language’ (p.11). In fact, in a broader sense, the term ‘proficiency’ encompasses concepts like ability, knowledge and competence by which ‘a high level of skill, well-developed knowledge or polished performance’ is indicated (Hadley, 2001). In a testing context, being proficient means carrying adequate command of the language ‘for a particular purpose’ or ‘for reaching a particular standard’ (Hughes, 2003). Highlighting that ‘relating a test to a model of language ability’ can provide us with a useful framework, Louma (2004) suggests that we need a well-developed reference framework in order to construct and analyse a proficiency test that clearly sets its particular goals and proficiency definition.

In this regard, a well-designed model of language ability should offer a clear and concise description of language competence while simultaneously emphasizing the communicative component. Since communicative language ability has gained a significant role in language learning and use, theories of language performance that explicitly covers communicative competence are regarded current, practical and efficient in language assessment as well. The most popular frameworks that are preferred in second and foreign language education and assessment include Canale and Swain’s (1980) theoretical framework for communicative competence and Bachman’s (1990) theoretical framework of communicative language ability (as cited in Hadley, 2001). As both Hadley (2001) and Louma (2004) underline, the theoretical model of language ability designed by Bachman and Palmer (1996), which is developed from Bachman’s previous framework of communicative language ability (as cited in Louma, 2004), is one of the most frequently utilised models in language testing. This model is basically composed of two main components: (a) language knowledge and (b) strategic knowledge (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p.67).

Although there are few studies on YDS-English in the literature (see Akın, 2016; Güleç, 2013), to the best of my knowledge so far, the present paper is the first attempt to analyse the construct of YDS-English in terms of the *language knowledge* component of the model of language ability designed by Bachman and Palmer (1996). The ‘language knowledge’ component of the framework, or ‘language competence’ in Bachman’s original term (1990), is used in this paper as a baseline to develop a concise, yet critical, analysis of the construct of YDS-English. Bachman and Palmer (1996) state that ‘language knowledge’ is ‘a domain of information in memory that is available for use by the metacognitive strategies in creating and interpreting discourse in language use’ (p.67) and it covers two categories, each of which involves two other components as well (for the full chart, see Appendix 1.A). Briefly, language knowledge involves organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge. *Organizational knowledge* focuses on formal language structures, and addresses both *grammatical knowledge* (i.e., knowledge of vocabulary, of morphology, of syntax and of phonology) and *textual knowledge* (i.e., knowledge of textual cohesion and of rhetorical organization). *Pragmatic knowledge*, as the second major category, is related to the ability to use language appropriately within the communicative goals of language users and the context of language use. Pragmatic knowledge involves *functional knowledge* (i.e., knowledge of functional characteristics of language according to the user’s aim) and *sociolinguistic knowledge* (i.e., being able to create an appropriate relationship between language forms and the context in which the language is used) (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p.67-70). For the purpose of this paper, a test analysis checklist prepared by Bachman and Palmer (1996) was revised and utilised to analyse the construct and sections of YDS-English in terms of *language knowledge* component of the model (for the adapted checklist, see Appendix 1.B). After the analysis, the provisional findings were shared and discussed with the colleagues who were familiar with both YDS-English and the analysis checklist in order to increase the reliability of this study.

It is important to note that since OSYM shares only 10 percent of the tests with public, a limited number of questions could be analysed through the checklist. As the test takers can view the whole test on their online profile for a limited time after they take the test, I took it in Spring 2016 and had the opportunity to access all of the questions in YDS-English Spring 2016.

### 3. Analysis of YDS-English through a test analysis checklist on language knowledge

YDS-English includes eight sections and these sections can be listed as fill-in-the-blanks and cloze tests, sentence completion, translation, reading comprehension, dialogue completion, paraphrasing/restatement, paragraph completion and finding the irrelevant sentence. The first section of the test is comprised of questions prepared in a fill-in-the-blanks format including two cloze tests. For the first sixteen questions, test takers are asked to fill in the blanks in the stems by choosing the correct answer from the options provided. This part primarily attempts to assess test takers’ knowledge of vocabulary and syntax/structure (i.e., grammatical knowledge). In some questions, moreover, textual knowledge is also assessed. For instance, test takers’ ability to comprehend the relationship (i.e., cohesion) between two clauses in the stem can be measured in some of the questions. The next part in this section includes two cloze tests, each of which has five questions. Aitken (1977) claims that cloze tests, which can be developed easily, are considered both valid and reliable tools to assess language proficiency. Although this statement was expressed at the time when cloze tests were strongly supported and promoted, it is possible to claim that cloze tests are still preferred by several testing institutions to assess language knowledge. In principle, a number of words are removed from a text at regular intervals, and test takers are asked to replace the correct words for each blank (Aitken, 1977; Hughes, 2003). However, the cloze tests used in

YDS-English are not in a traditional cloze test format in which every  $n^{\text{th}}$  word is removed from the text. In the test, the removed items are particularly chosen to assess test takers' knowledge of cohesion as well as knowledge of vocabulary and syntax. Bagarić and Djigunović (2007) emphasize that organizational knowledge encompasses the ability to recognize and construct 'grammatically correct sentences' with meaningful and coherent contents (p.98). Thus, this part clearly attempts to measure organizational knowledge (i.e., both grammatical and textual knowledge) of the test takers.

In the second section, there are ten questions and test takers are asked to complete the given sentences by combining correct clauses. Bachman and Palmer (1996) define textual knowledge as the ability to 'produce and comprehend texts, which are units of language that consists of two or more utterances and sentences' (p.68). Therefore, like the previous section, the questions in this section also attempt to assess test takers' organizational knowledge, and the focus is on textual knowledge in particular.

The following section involves six translation questions, including translations both from Turkish to English and from English to Turkish. Mirici (2003) states that the questions in this section are designed to assess test takers' 'transferring skill from and to target language'. Translation can be regarded as a very useful testing technique, since it involves several aspects of language ability and addresses various types of language skills (i.e., reading, writing) (Hughes, 2003). Organizational knowledge (i.e., grammatical and textual knowledge) is the main focus in this section of the test. Furthermore, knowledge of rhetorical organization is directly addressed within the textual knowledge (e.g., organizational development in the sentences).

In the following section, which involves five separate paragraphs and four different questions for each paragraph, reading comprehension of test takers is explicitly assessed. The questions primarily measure test takers' grammatical knowledge and textual knowledge. In most cases, moreover, test takers need to understand the writers' aim and implied messages to answer the questions correctly; therefore, functional knowledge (within pragmatic knowledge) is somewhat covered in this section as well. However, in this case, the test takers might experience some difficulties due to fact that these texts have been adapted from so-called authentic sources (e.g., scientific magazines in English) and this can result in missing overall meaning of the original texts or the main intention of the text authors.

After reading comprehension, test takers are required to complete the given dialogues by choosing the most appropriate response among the options. In this section there are five questions and it is not unfair to claim that sociolinguistic knowledge is addressed here as well as grammatical, textual and functional knowledge. Bachman and Palmer (1996) define sociolinguistic knowledge as the language ability to construct or comprehend language 'that is appropriate to a particular language use setting' (p.70). Here, test takers are expected to demonstrate their 'knowledge of conversation' by taking natural or idiomatic expressions, cultural references and figures of speech into consideration. Although it is in a written format rather than speaking, this demand can be observed clearly in the questions in this section.

The next section involves four paraphrasing/restatement questions. Here, test takers are asked to choose the option that has the closest meaning of the given sentence in the stem. Mirici (2003) states that this section aims to measure test takers' transferring ability within the target language. The questions address both grammatical and textual knowledge of test takers. Moreover, since test takers need to understand overall purpose and meaning of the given sentences, functional knowledge in a very broad sense is also assessed in this section.

After paraphrasing questions, test takers are asked to complete the given paragraphs by choosing the most appropriate sentences. There are four questions for paragraph completion, each of which is usually made up of five or six sentences. The main focus in this section is on creating coherent and meaningful paragraphs; therefore, this section explicitly attempts to measure knowledge of cohesion and rhetoric (i.e., textual knowledge) along with grammatical knowledge of test takers.

Finally, in the last section, which involves five questions, test takers are expected to find the irrelevant sentence in the given paragraphs. The paragraphs consist of five sentences and in each paragraph one of the sentences is irrelevant, which negatively affects coherence and cohesion of the texts. This section directly attempts to assess test takers' textual knowledge. It is also possible to claim that grammatical knowledge and functional knowledge are addressed through the questions in this section.

In principle, varied areas of language knowledge are covered throughout the test such as grammatical knowledge (e.g., knowledge of vocabulary and syntax), textual knowledge (e.g., knowledge of cohesion and rhetorical organization), functional knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge. However, since YDS-English is designed and administered in a multiple-choice test format, these areas are not measured completely. For example, being able to choose the most appropriate and grammatically correct options does not always mean that test takers apply this ability in language use in real life (e.g., through actual speaking and writing performances). Although YDS-English is a proficiency test, it primarily assesses 'recognition knowledge' as it depends on the multiple-choice technique. Hughes (2003) stresses that test takers' performance on a multiple choice test 'may give an inaccurate picture of their language ability', thus it does not bridge the gap between language knowledge and language use (p.76). However, this does not mean that the test completely fails in assessing test takers' language knowledge. Bachman and Palmer (1996) do not limit the areas of knowledge with the productive abilities only, they include recognition knowledge as well. For example, the authors carefully describe each types of knowledge as 'to produce or comprehend...' particular aspects of language.

Although Bachman and Palmer (1996) do not regard reading, writing, listening and speaking as separate 'language skills' but 'language use activities' in their framework (as cited in Louma, 2004), in this paper each of these activities are considered as a distinctive language skill. In practice, YDS-English directly assesses test takers' reading skills and grammar and vocabulary subskills while writing and speaking skills are addressed very indirectly through the multiple choice questions. For example, it can be claimed that translation, sentence completion and paragraph completion cover writing skills, and dialogue completion indirectly and inadequately addresses speaking skills (particularly in terms of 'pragmatic knowledge'). However, the test pays no attention to test takers' listening or pronunciation skills. In effect, not covering productive skills explicitly as a proficiency test results in undesirable effects such as reducing validity and efficiency of the test.

#### **4. Validity and reliability issues**

For the purpose of this paper, face validity, content validity and criterion-related validity of YDS-English are briefly addressed. Hughes (2003) states that a test has face validity if 'it looks as if it measures what it is supposed to measure' (p.33). In the test handbook prepared by OSYM (2016), it is stated that the test aims to assess language proficiency of test takers via questions on 'vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension and translation' (p.9). Since the test does not claim that it attempts to assess test takers' speaking or listening skills, it has indeed face validity. In addition to face validity, it can be claimed that YDS-English has content validity, although not directly addressing productive skills as a language proficiency

test clearly reduces this type of validity. A language test is regarded as having content validity if its content presents well-chosen samples of target language that the test attempts to assess (Brown, 1996; Brown, 2007; Hughes, 2003). In this sense, a representative group of samples from various areas of language (e.g., vocabulary, reading comprehension) is provided throughout the test. Furthermore, most of the samples are claimed to be taken from ‘authentic’ resources such as science magazines and news articles in English. As for criterion-related validity, however, the test is not highly valid since the results may not have a correlation with language use in target contexts and with other independent and highly reliable assessment tools. Although this kind of claims needs concrete evidence, not only my own observations and experiences in English language assessment but also my personal communication with assessment authorities in Turkey indicate that the test is not very useful to predict test takers’ future language performance in real life communication. In fact, further studies and analyses are needed in order to make more well-grounded judgements about criterion-related validity of the test. Finally, it is worth noting that publishing a handbook with useful information about the test, using direct testing to assess vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension, and scoring the test objectively might increase the overall validity of the test.

Hughes (2003) highlights that ‘if a test is not reliable it cannot be valid’ (p.34). Reliability is defined as the consistency of the assessment (i.e., similar test scores by same test-takers at different time) (Brown, 2007; Hughes, 2003; O’Malley & Pierce, 1996). This definition encompasses two major components of the concept of reliability: test takers’ performance and scoring procedures (Hughes, 2003). In order to increase reliability of a test by addressing these two components, Hughes (2003) offers several suggestions (p.44-50). In the light of these points that Hughes highlights, YDS-English can be considered relatively reliable since (a) it provides enough samples for the areas it attempts to measure, (b) it requires test takers to find a correct answer among limited but enough number of options, (c) the instructions are clearly provided in Turkish for each section of the test and further information is given in the handbook, (d) the items are typed and placed clearly, (e) the test takers are relatively familiar with the test technique since the formal testing system in Turkey mostly relies on multiple-choice technique and (f) the scoring is objective and clear for each test taker.

Neglecting speaking, listening and writing skills directly in the test has both advantageous and disadvantageous outcomes in the contexts of validity and reliability. Not addressing these skills makes YDS-English less effective and efficient in assessing language proficiency. However, this situation definitely increases the practicality of the test (e.g., time and human resources during both testing and scoring processes) and removes some possible reliability issues such as subjective scoring and lack of samples of target performance, particularly because it is often very difficult to provide enough and well-chosen representatives of speaking and writing items.

## **5. Discussion and possible washback effects of YDS-English**

Every year thousands of candidates take YDS-English to measure their language proficiency or to get academic promotion in Turkey. Therefore, this high-stakes test has some inevitable influence on language education in Turkey. The effect that tests have on learning and teaching processes is called washback (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Hughes, 2003), and Hughes (2003) underlines that today washback (or backwash) is regarded as a crucial part of the impact that a test has on individuals (i.e., teachers, learners, policy makers), on educational system and policies and on society in a broader sense as well.

There are a few studies in the literature on the washback effects of similar tests (e.g., KPDS and UDS) previously conducted by OSYM (see Akpınar & Cakildere, 2013; Özmen,

2011) and it is possible to claim that the results and implications of these studies might be applicable to YDS-English as well. As one of the backwash effects, one can claim that preparation for the test encourages test takers to study English because they may be promoted or given financial support depending on their levels of language proficiency. However, it should be pointed out that test takers usually tend to focus merely on testing strategies instead of on improving their overall language abilities. Moreover, when test takers study English to prepare for the test, they usually pay great attention to grammar, vocabulary and reading skills and overlook other aspects of language use such as speaking, pronunciation and listening because of the current design of the test (see Akpınar & Cakildere, 2013). Another impact of the test is that test takers spend a lot of time on mock exams to improve their recognition knowledge and their familiarity with the multiple-choice technique. This creates a new branch in the language learning marketing in Turkey: preparation books and private courses for YDS-English. Although some of them can be considered very valuable resources in the market, quality of these publications or efficiency of such courses are highly questionable. The present paper can provide a springboard to consider such issues in a more holistic way and to include main language skills in the process of preparation for YDS-English. For example, addressing test takers' speaking and writing skills in a more explicit and communicative way might contribute to their success in the sections related to dialogue completion, paraphrasing and paragraph completion as well as to their English language proficiency in general. Indeed, this will be in line with current trends and approaches in language teaching and assessment as well.

It is possible to claim that potential backwash effects of the test reveal useful implications for the future of YDS-English as well. For example, now both test developers (i.e., OSYM) and test takers are aware of the fact that the test does not meet all the needs to assess language proficiency effectively (see Yavuzer & Göver, 2012). Although it is considered as practical and reliable, the test design should be changed according to the needs of test takers and current demands of language instruction and assessment (e.g., computer/internet assistance, communicative purposes and means etc.). Thus, it may efficiently address pragmatic areas of language knowledge and productive language skills as well. In fact, since September 2014, OSYM has been administering a computer-based version of YDS-English (Elektronik YDS, *e-YDS*) every month (i.e., 12 times a year). However, *e-YDS* is simply an electronic version of the current YDS-English and it does not aim to assess any productive language skills. Since changes in language assessment and language instruction influence each other, such revisions in YDS-English (e.g., utilising online resources, including all language skills and language knowledge areas and so on) will consequently affect language teaching and learning processes in Turkey. Finally, the results of the test can be analysed systematically and an extensive research project supported by OSYM and other stakeholders can be conducted in order to improve the test to meet the current needs and to improve language education policies and process in Turkey.

## **6. Conclusion**

As conclusion, the construct analysis of YDS-English reveals that the test mainly focuses on grammatical and textual knowledge more than pragmatic knowledge, and by its nature it neglects communicative and productive language abilities of test takers. While Rimmer (2006) states that grammatical knowledge highly 'correlates with overall proficiency' (p.497), Kitao and Kitao (1996) underline that today well-designed proficiency tests should directly address communicative competence. Moreover, proficiency tests should involve both receptive and productive skills, and reflect language use in real life, thus turning into an authentic assessment tool for language proficiency. In the light of these points, YDS-English can be (re)constructed more effectively by addressing all areas of language knowledge and

encompassing communicative and strategic aspects of language use. Moreover, although YDS-English is very popular as a language proficiency assessment tool in Turkey, there are a limited number of in-depth studies on the test in the literature. Therefore, there is still a need for studies providing empirical data and detailed analyses on the test, ideally supported by OSYM as it is the official body of administration and development of YDS in Turkey, in order to provide well-grounded claims and directions for the possible improvements.

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**Appendix 1.A:**

Areas of language knowledge (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p.68)

<b>Language Knowledge</b>			
<b>Organizational knowledge</b>		<b>Pragmatic knowledge</b>	
<b>Grammatical knowledge:</b>	<b>Textual knowledge:</b>	<b>Functional knowledge:</b>	<b>Sociolinguistic knowledge:</b>
- knowledge of vocabulary - knowledge of syntax - knowledge of phonology/graphology	- knowledge of cohesion - knowledge of rhetorical or conversational organization	- knowledge of ideational functions - knowledge of manipulative functions - knowledge of heuristic functions - knowledge of imaginative functions	- knowledge of dialects/varieties - knowledge of registers - knowledge of natural or idiomatic expressions - knowledge of cultural references and figures of speech

**Appendix 1.B:**

Adapted from Components of language ability: A test analysis checklist (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p.77)

<b>Sections</b>	<b>Component of language ability</b>		<b>Samples / Questions</b>	<b>Comments</b>
	Organisational knowledge	GRAM: Vocabulary		
		GRAM: Syntax		
		GRAM: Phonological/Graphological		
		TEXT: Cohesion		
		TEXT: Rhetorical organization		
	Pragmatic knowledge	FUNCT: Ideational		
		FUNCT: Manipulative		
		FUNCT: Heuristic		
		FUNCT: Imaginative		
		SOCIO: Dialect		
		SOCIO: Register		
		SOCIO: Naturalness		
		SOCIO: Cultural references and figurative language		
	META?			