

Aptitude for interpreting: assessing what isn't there (yet)

Aptitude testing is a special type of assessment where performance is judged by a predictive, rather than a concurrent criterion. Aptitude tests are critical in admission procedures, where they help make decisions as to the candidate's ability to acquire a skill within a given timeframe. The present study is part of a larger research project (2007-2010), aiming to investigate predictors of specific skilled linguistic behaviour, namely interpreting. We briefly discuss current aptitude tests, which are based on face validity/authenticity, but display little predictive validity. We then report on our replication of a study by Gerver et al. (1994) which identified several predictors. Five types of language processing ability tests (logical memory, text memory, cloze, error detection, synonym generation) were administered to 100 foreign language and interpreting students, and their performance was correlated with end-of-year exam results. Our findings do not confirm Gerver et al.'s conclusions: none of the assumed predictors came out as significant in our study. We discuss the implications of this particular study and the more general specificities of aptitude research, including validity, reliability, score range restrictions and generalisability across training programmes.