



Language Assessment in EAP: Perspectives and Issues
A Public Seminar at Simon Fraser University, 2nd April 2019

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My existential moment at Sydney Airport



The Immigration Officer wanted to know my profession

What do you do in
Hong Kong?

I'm a university
teacher.

I see. What do you
teach at university?

I teach English.

????

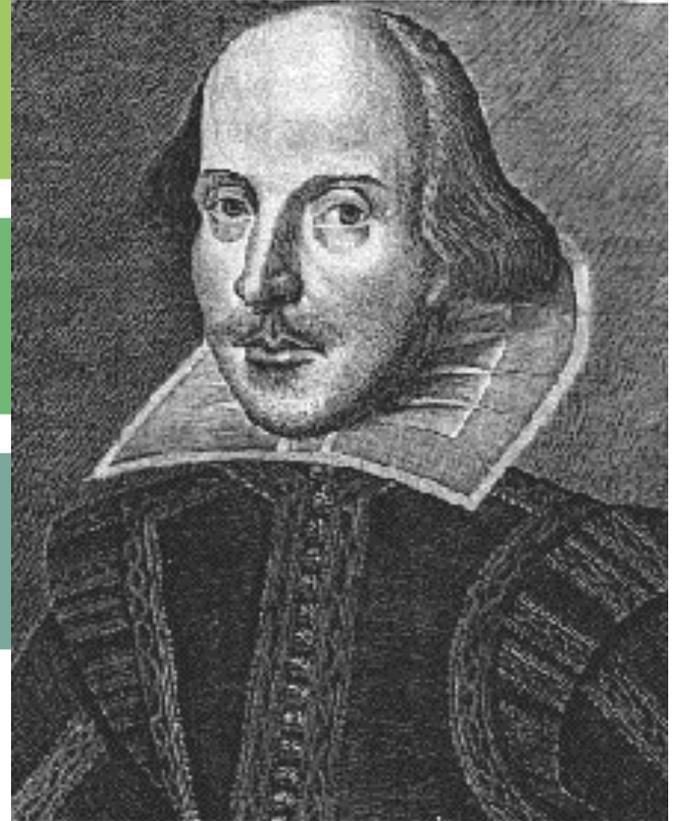
I gave an intuitive answer

I teach English.

???

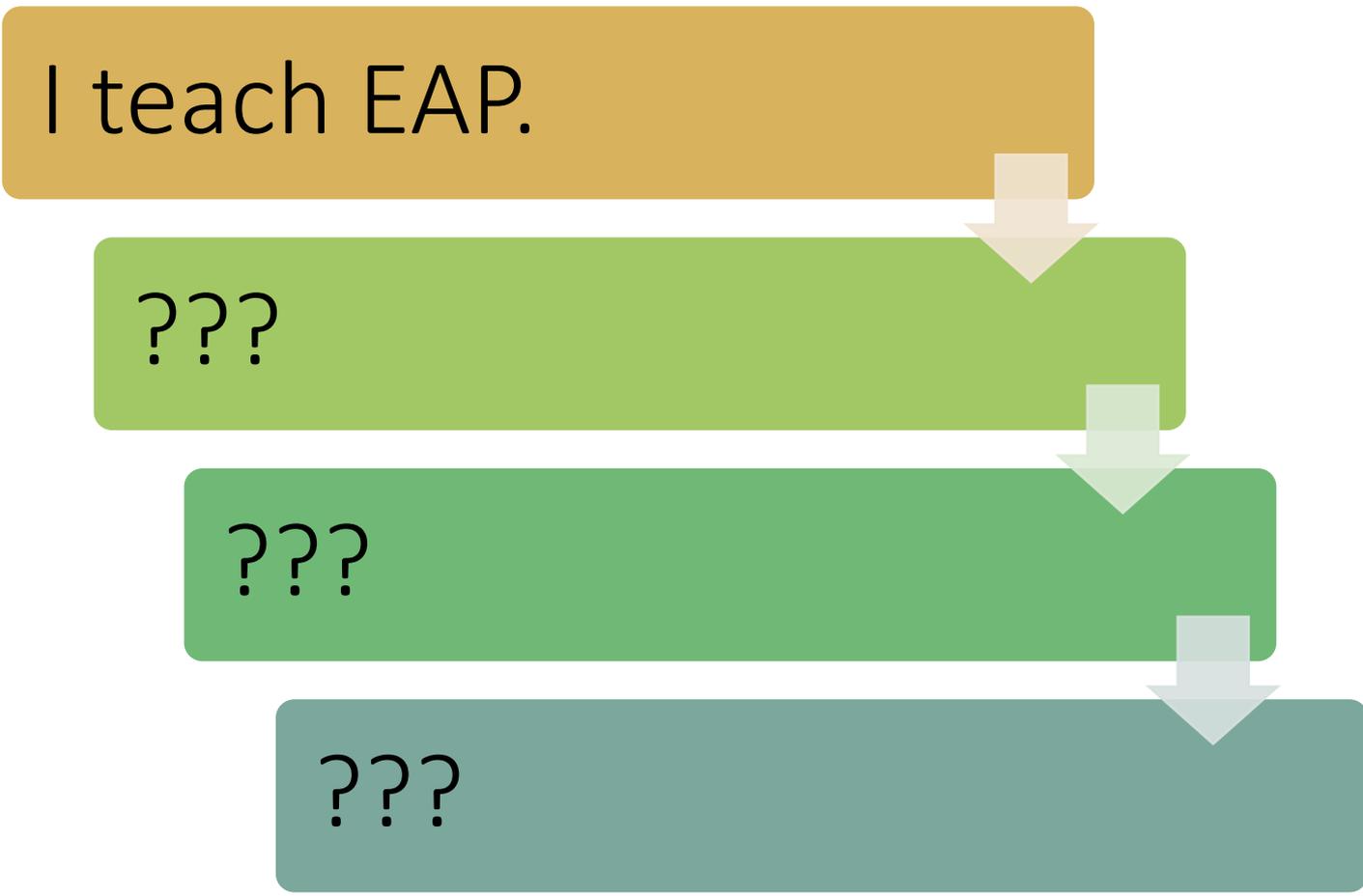
???

???



I could have said it differently

I teach EAP.

A vertical flow diagram consisting of four rounded rectangular boxes stacked vertically. The top box is orange and contains the text 'I teach EAP.'. Below it is a light green box containing '???' with a light orange arrow pointing down from the top box to it. The third box is a darker green, also containing '???' with a light green arrow pointing down from the second box to it. The bottom box is a teal color, containing '???' with a light grey arrow pointing down from the third box to it.

???

???

???

Issues with EAP

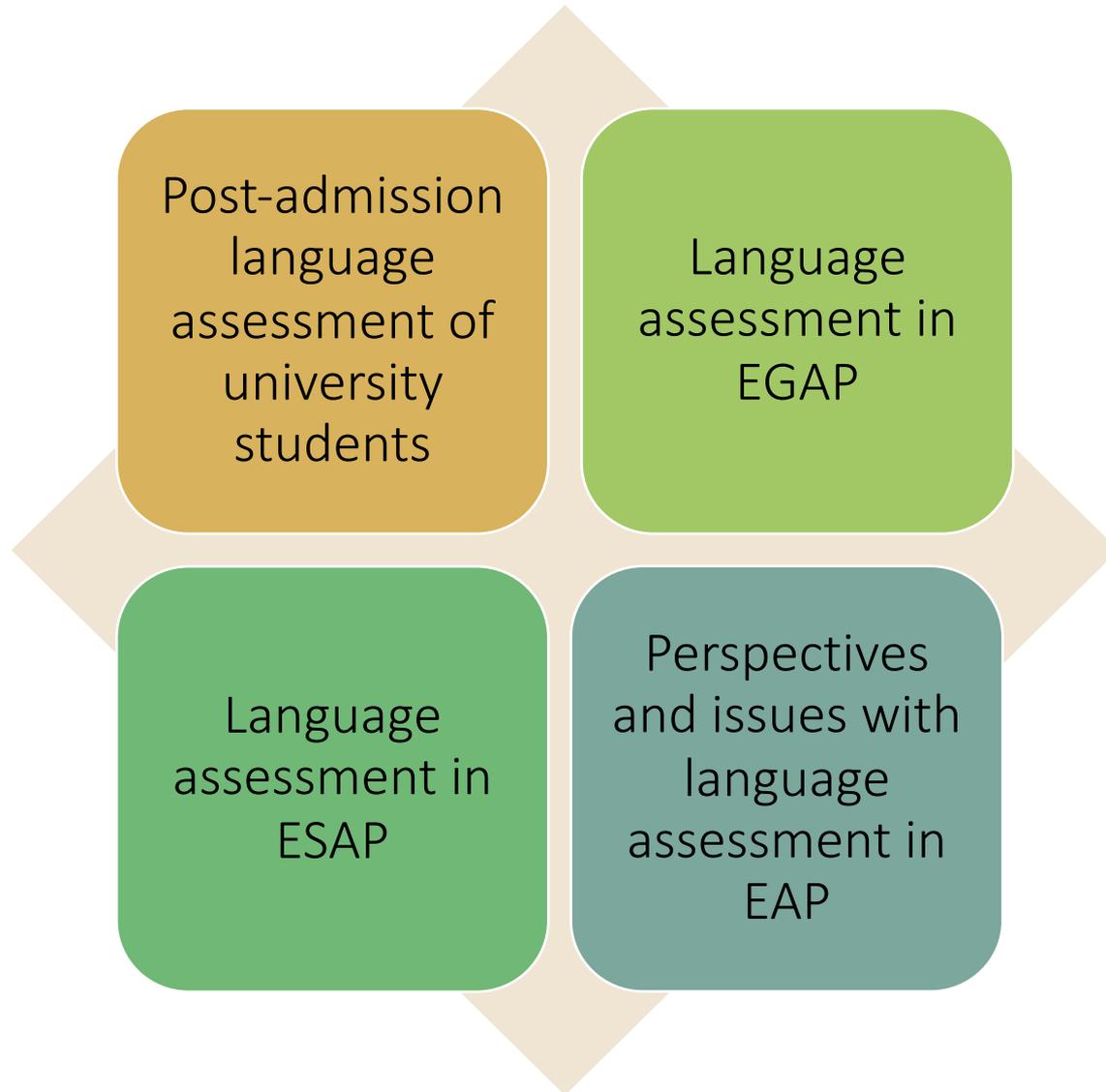
The abbreviations are opaque

EAP teachers do not know the subject content

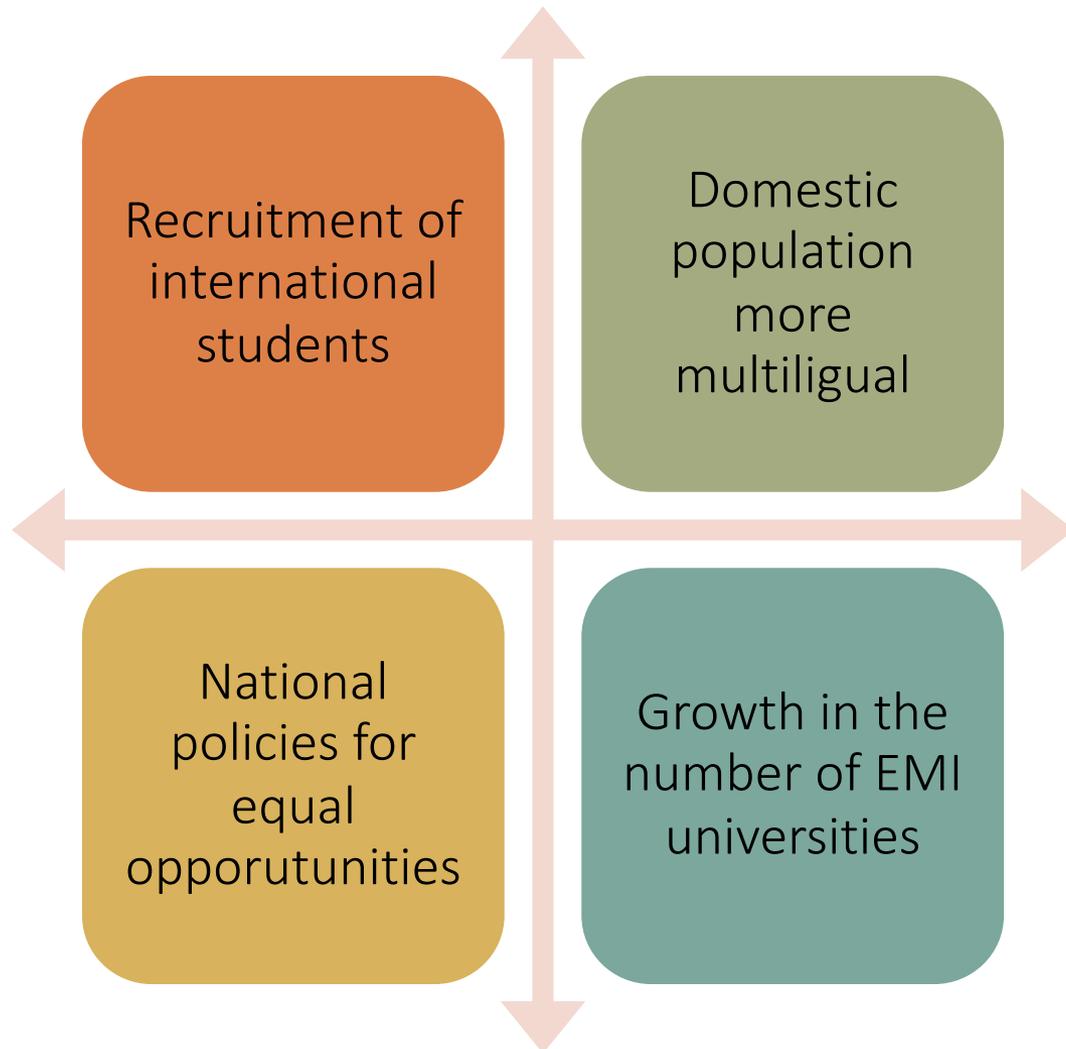
Every student belongs to their 'home department', which is *not* English

Learner success is typically *not* measured by EAP/ESP teachers

Agenda for the Seminar



The need: Greater diversity in linguistic abilities among university students



Universities face challenges

In all these countries, whether “English-speaking” or not, it cannot be assumed that students entering the university are adequately prepared to cope with the language and literacy demands of degree studies through the medium of English. (Read, 2016, 4)

Controversy in Australia

Birrell (2006), an Australian academic specializing in immigration research... produced evidence that students were graduating with degrees in accounting and information technology, yet were unable to obtain the minimum score of 6.0 in IELTS needed for permanent residence and employment in Australia. (Read, 2016, 4-5)

Development in Australia

In 2009, the Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) developed 10 Good Practice Principles for higher educational institutions to follow in order to improve the English language proficiency of international students.

Three Relevant Principles

1. Universities are responsible for ensuring that their students are sufficiently competent in the English language to effectively participate in their university studies.
2. Students have responsibilities for further developing their ELP during their study at university and are advised of these responsibilities prior to enrolment.
3. Students' English language development needs are diagnosed early in their studies and addressed, with ongoing opportunities for self-assessment.
4. Students' English
Students' English language development needs are diagnosed early in their studies and addressed, with ongoing opportunities for self-assessment.

Teaching Context at HKUST

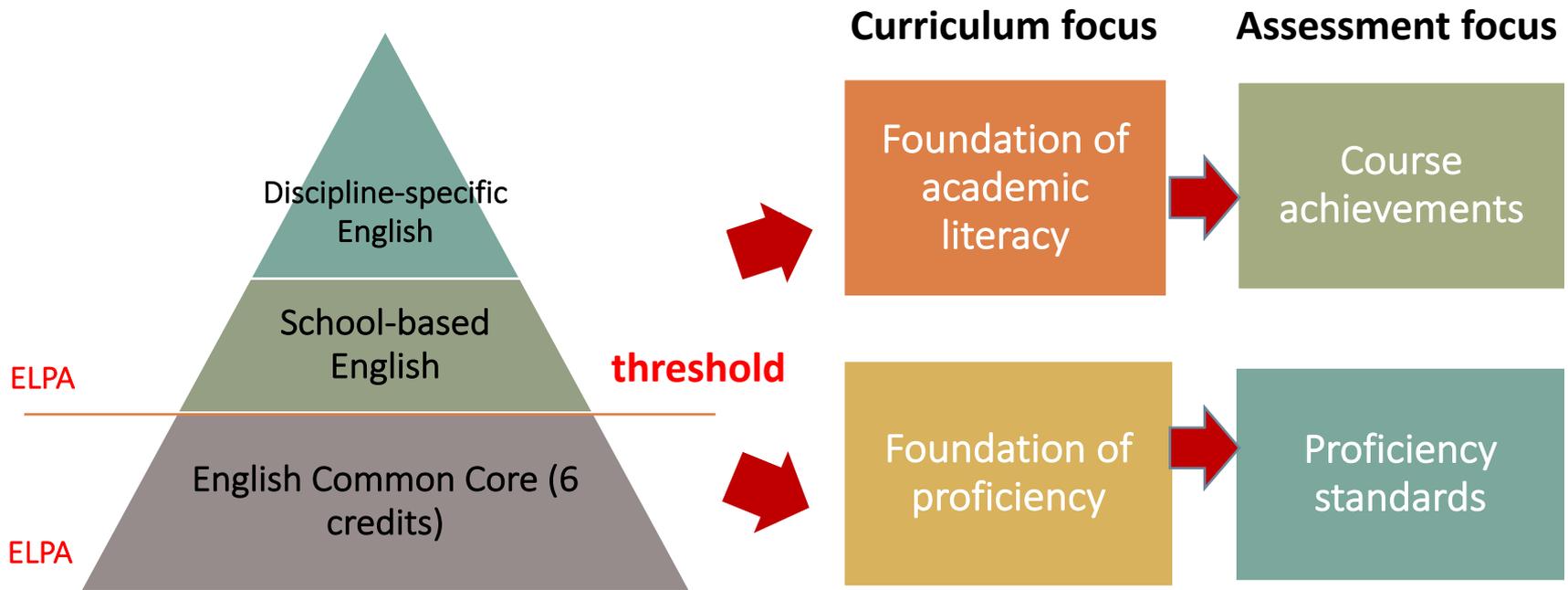
Medium of Instruction: English (85% ethnic Chinese, 15% international)

English Curriculum: 12 credits (out of 120 credits for UG graduation)

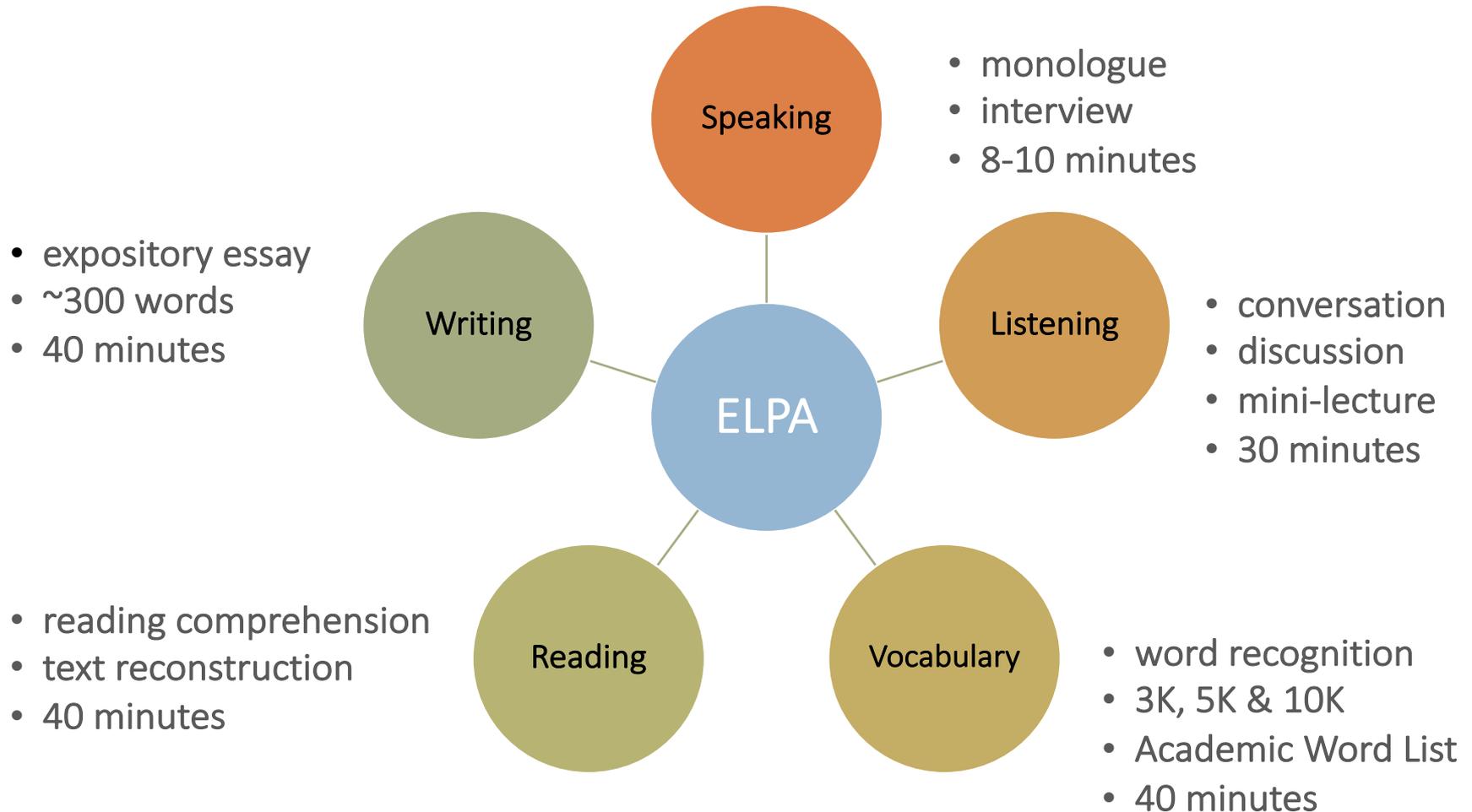
English Core Course for Year One:

- *6 credits, front heavy loading of credits*
- *from CEFR B1 – B2 (IELTS 5.0 to 6.5) at the admission point*
- *weaker productive skills*
- *over 90% ethnic Chinese*
- *high expectations by the University*
- *a proficiency threshold to be achieved by the end of Year One*
- *How to measure the threshold? An external or internal test?*
- *CLE's strategy – a home-grown English test (**ELPA**)*

Role of ELPA at HKUST



The Design of ELPA



Curriculum Alignment

Support for Learners

- diagnostic
- formative
- summative
- learning support

Learning

Curriculum Standards

- externally benchmarked
- criterion-based
- achievable
- meaningful

Assessment

Teaching

Assessment Tool

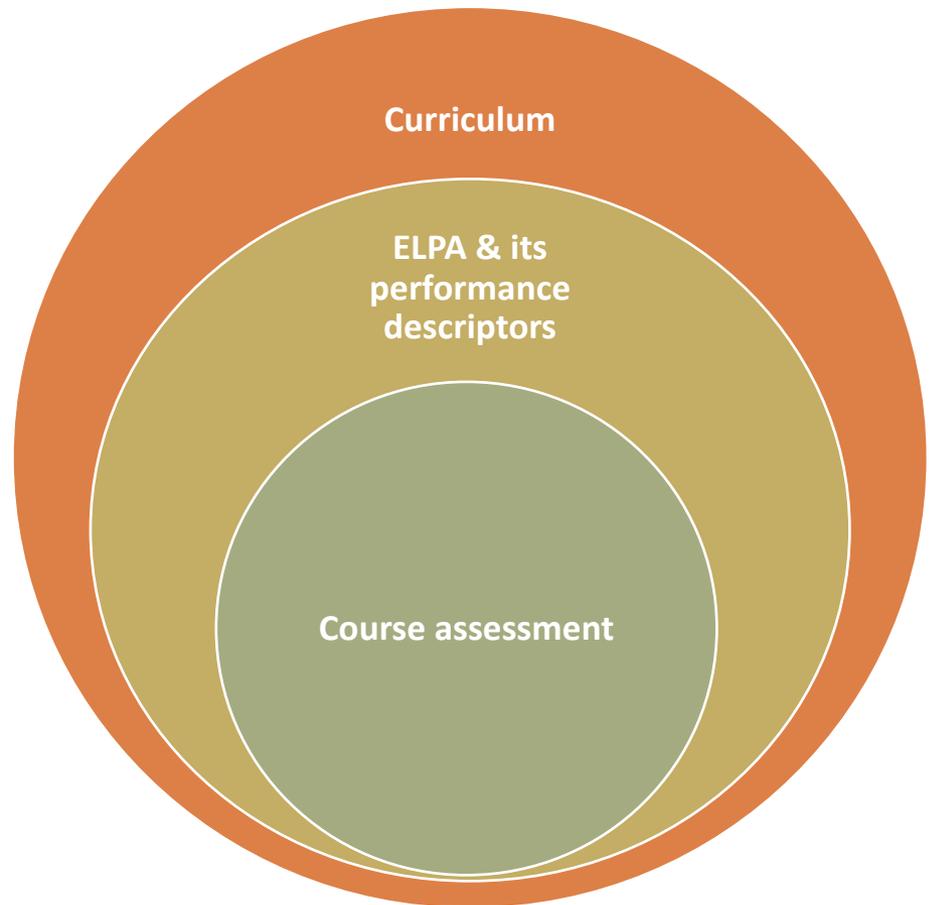
- control & flexibility
- positive feedback
- curriculum driven & embedded

- testing & teaching
- same set of constructs
- practical & practicable

Curriculum Alignment

What we have done in order to create positive washback with ELPA:

- Curriculum-driven and -embedded
- Alignment – shared construct
- Types of feedback at different points
 - Diagnostic (pre-test)
 - Formative (course assessment and ELPA practice)
 - Summative (post-test)
- Teacher involvement in ELPA assessing, test development, test administration...
- An informal curriculum is developed to give language learning support to the (weaker) E Core students.
- ELPA ➡ a learning-oriented assessment



Applied Linguistics

- Test design
- Validity
- Reliability
- Assessment literacy of teachers

Learning-oriented assessment

Decision-making processes

- Context
- Communication
- Compassion

Collaboration with stake-holders

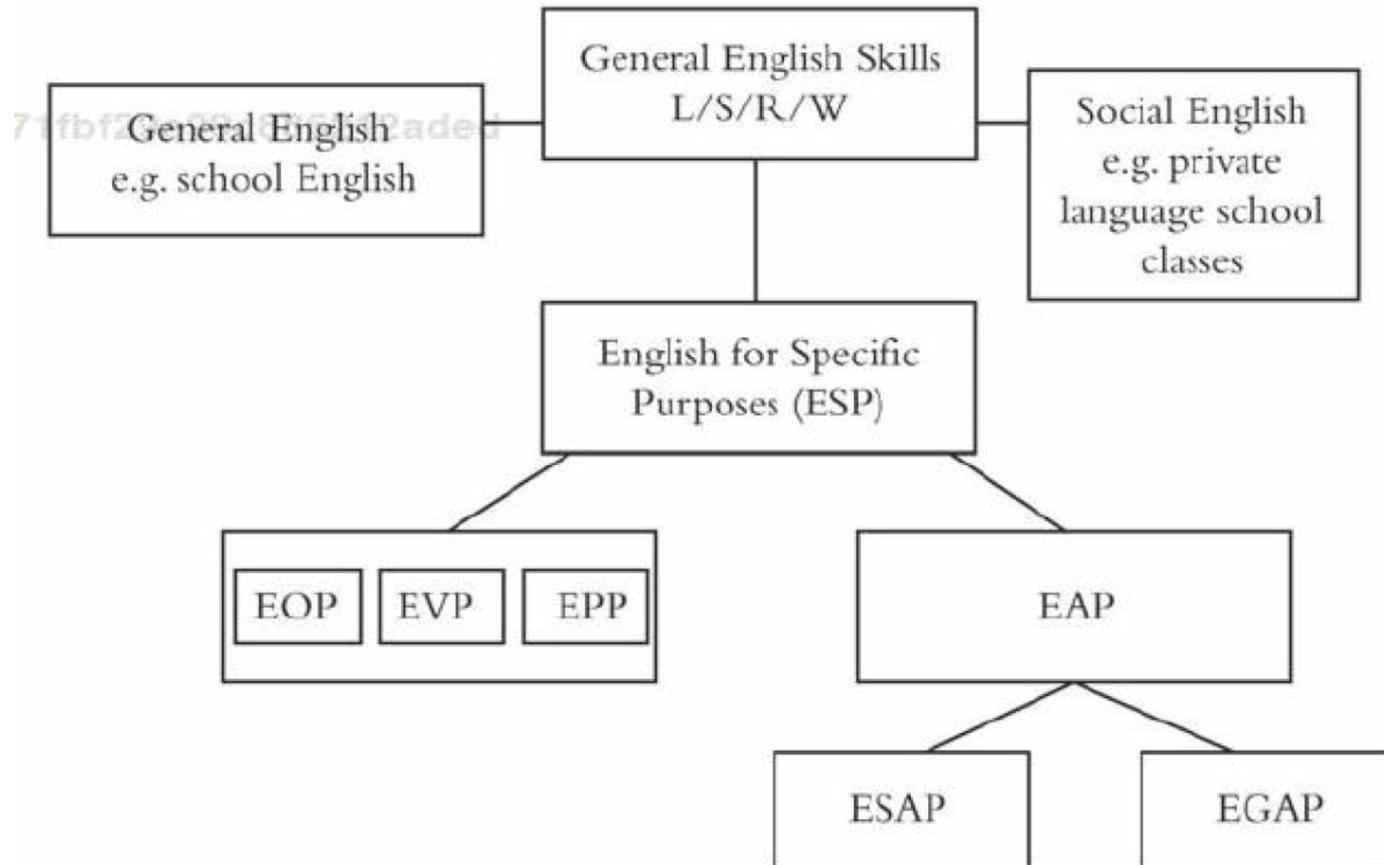
- Positive washback
- Feedback provision
- Learner support

- Multiple purposes
- Multiple stakeholder implications

Language Education

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Miller (2014)'s model for EST courses



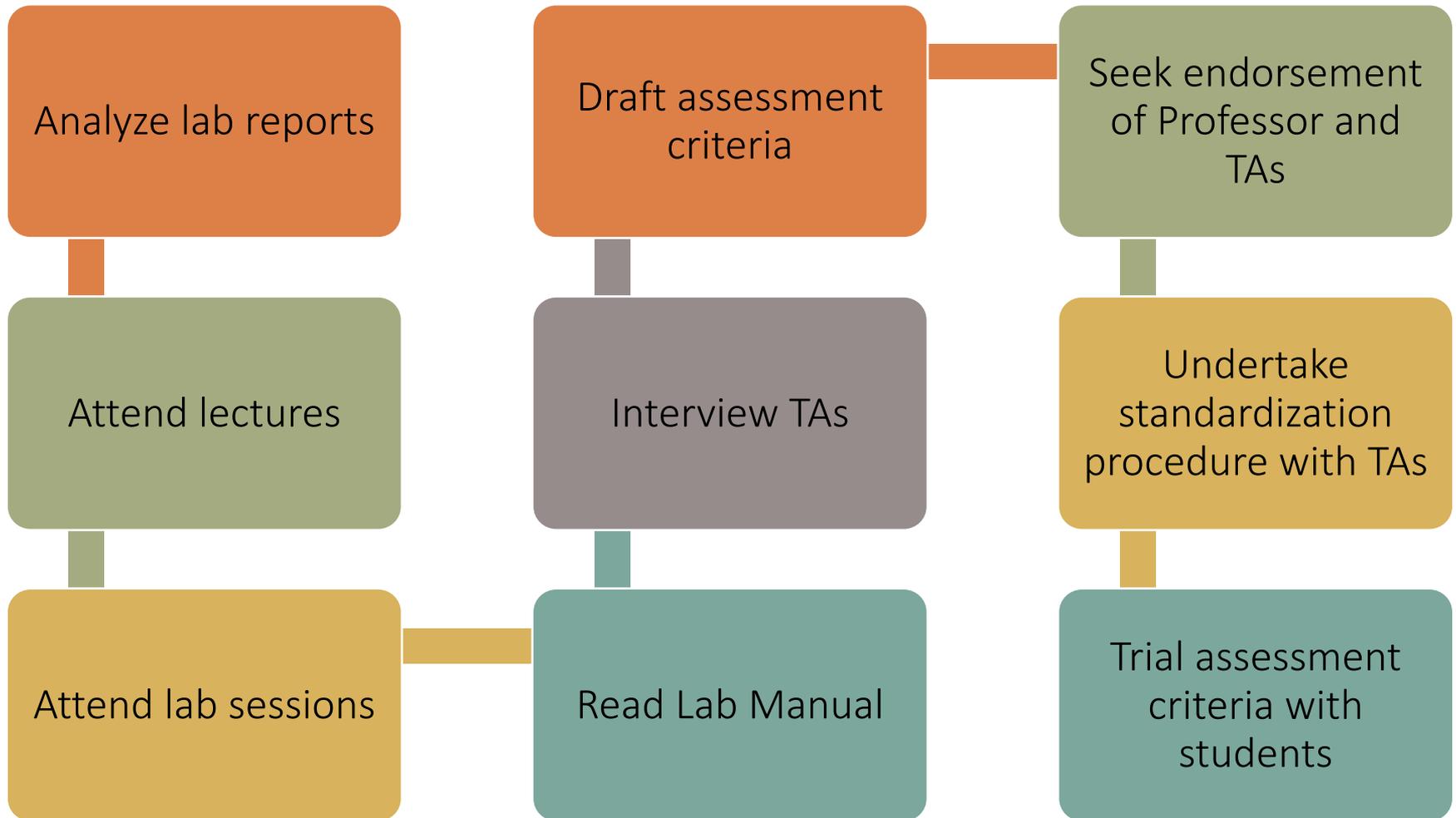
Assessment in ESAP: LANG 4034

What makes a good Mechanical Engineering lab report?

Does language matter with a lab report? And in what ways?

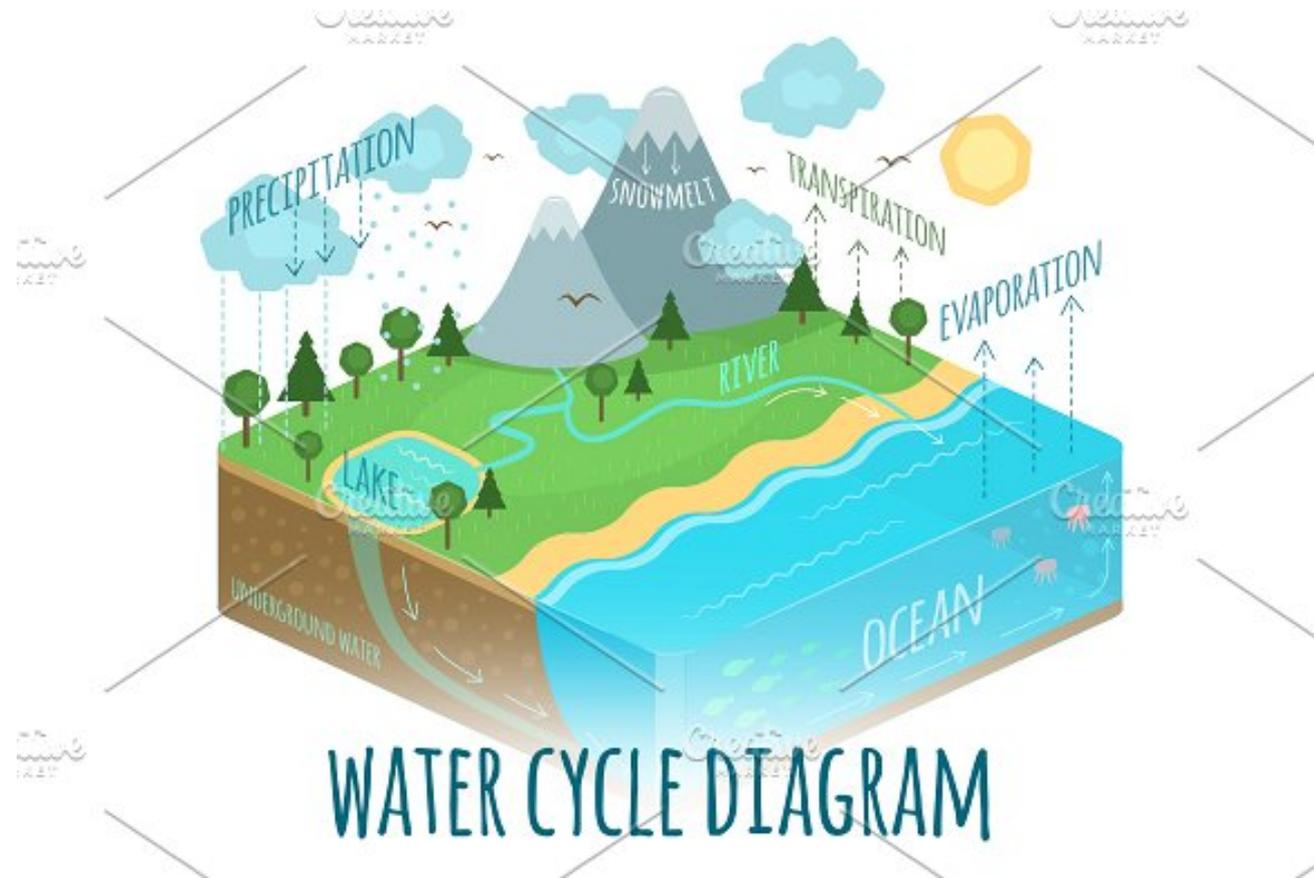
What do the marking criteria of lab reports look like?

Due diligence: the LANG 4034 assessment design roadmap



Assessment in ESAP

The two explanations given to you were elicited using a diagram of the water cycle. Decide which one achieves the task more fully. Explain why.



Explanation A

- (1) Initially, the water cycle begins as snow melts from the glaciers.
- (2) The water then meanders through various water shed until it reaches rivers and lakes. Water eventually reaches the oceans.
- (3) Water, then, becomes water vapour (it evaporates into the air) and accumulates in what we call clouds.
- (4) The 'clouds' then distribute water in the form of rain, snow, or sleet back to the mountains where the cycle begins again.

Explanation B

The water cycle: The sun is the source of our water. The water, or hydrological, cycle begins when the sun heats up the ocean to produce water vapour through evaporation. This water vapour mixes with dust in the atmosphere and forms clouds. Cool air causes condensation of water droplets in the clouds, bringing about precipitation, or rain. This rain then falls into rivers, streams and lakes and eventually returns to the ocean, where the cycle begins again.

Explanation A

- (1) *Initially*, the water cycle *begins* as snow melts from the glaciers.
- (2) The water *then meanders* through various water shed until it *reaches* rivers and lakes. Water *eventually reaches* the oceans.
- (3) Water, *then, becomes* water vapour (it evaporates into the air) and accumulates in what we call clouds.
- (4) The 'clouds' *then distribute* water in the form of rain, snow, or sleet back to the mountains where the cycle *begins again*.

Explanation B

The water cycle: The sun is *the source of our water*. The water, or hydrological, cycle begins when the sun heats up the ocean *to produce water vapour through evaporation*. This water vapour mixes with dust in the atmosphere and forms clouds. Cool air *causes condensation* of water droplets in the clouds, *bringing about precipitation*, or rain. This rain then falls into rivers, streams and lakes and eventually returns to the ocean, where the cycle begins again.

Towards functional assessment

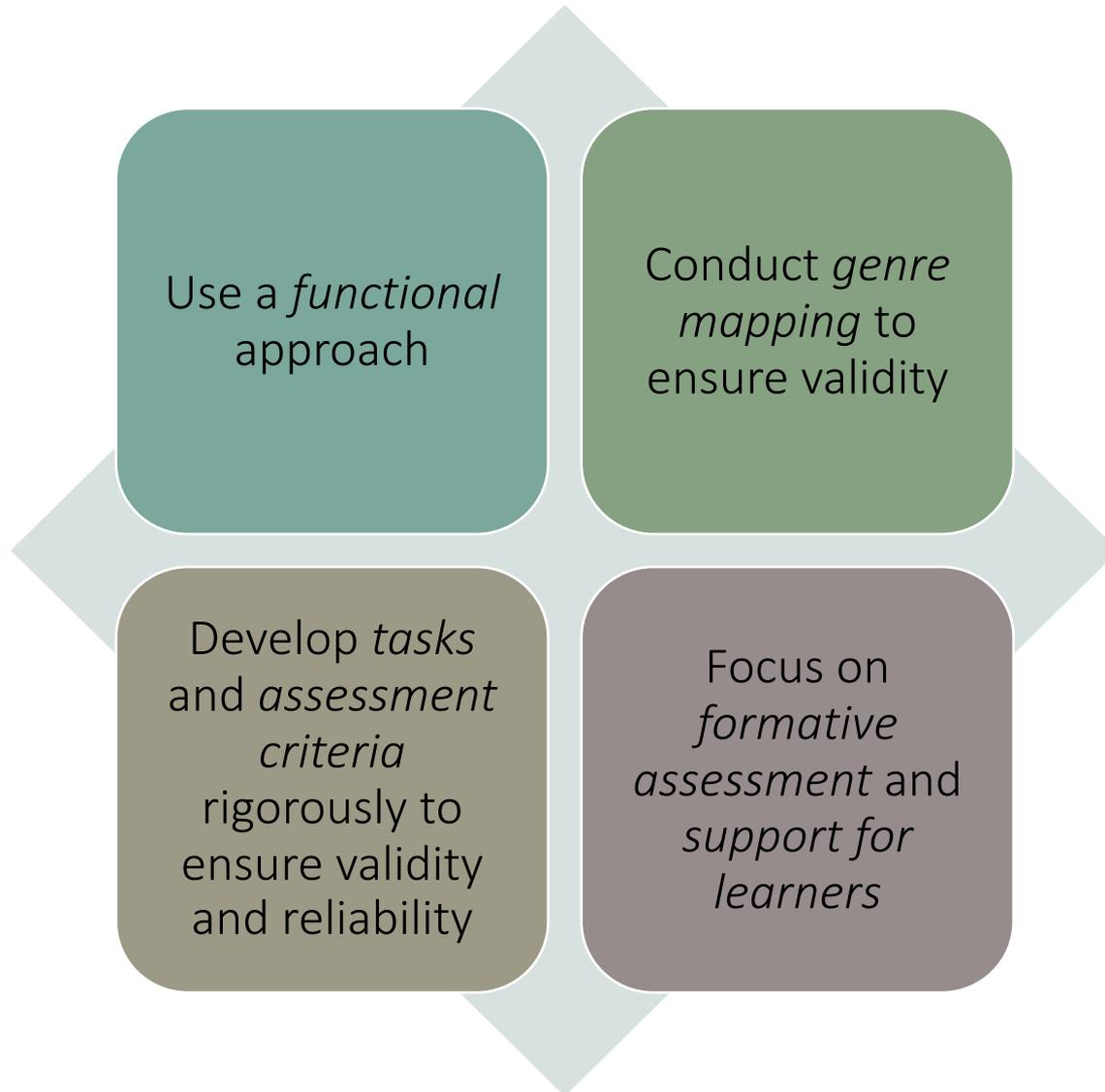
A competent assessor of these two texts should be able to recognize the difference in lines of meaning between the two explanations and how this difference is realized by a difference in wording... The assessor's claim is based on the way Explanation B has *used the resources of the language to create meaning in discourse, in this case a causal explanation*. *The claim is not based on whether* Explanation B is more factually correct than A or whether B violates fewer grammar rules or discourse conventions than A. (Mohan, Leung and Slater, 2010: 226-7)

Towards functional assessment

We will argue that the question requires a view of text as making meaning with language resources rather than the traditional view of text as a display of linguistic forms. (Mohan, Leung and Slater, 2010: 218)

... an assessment should assess how wording constructs the meaning of the text as a whole in its context on a linguistically principled basis. (Mohan, Leung and Slater, 2010: 225)

Good practice in ESAP assessment



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- Test design
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Learning-oriented assessment

Decision-making processes

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- Communication
- Compassion

Collaboration with stake-holders

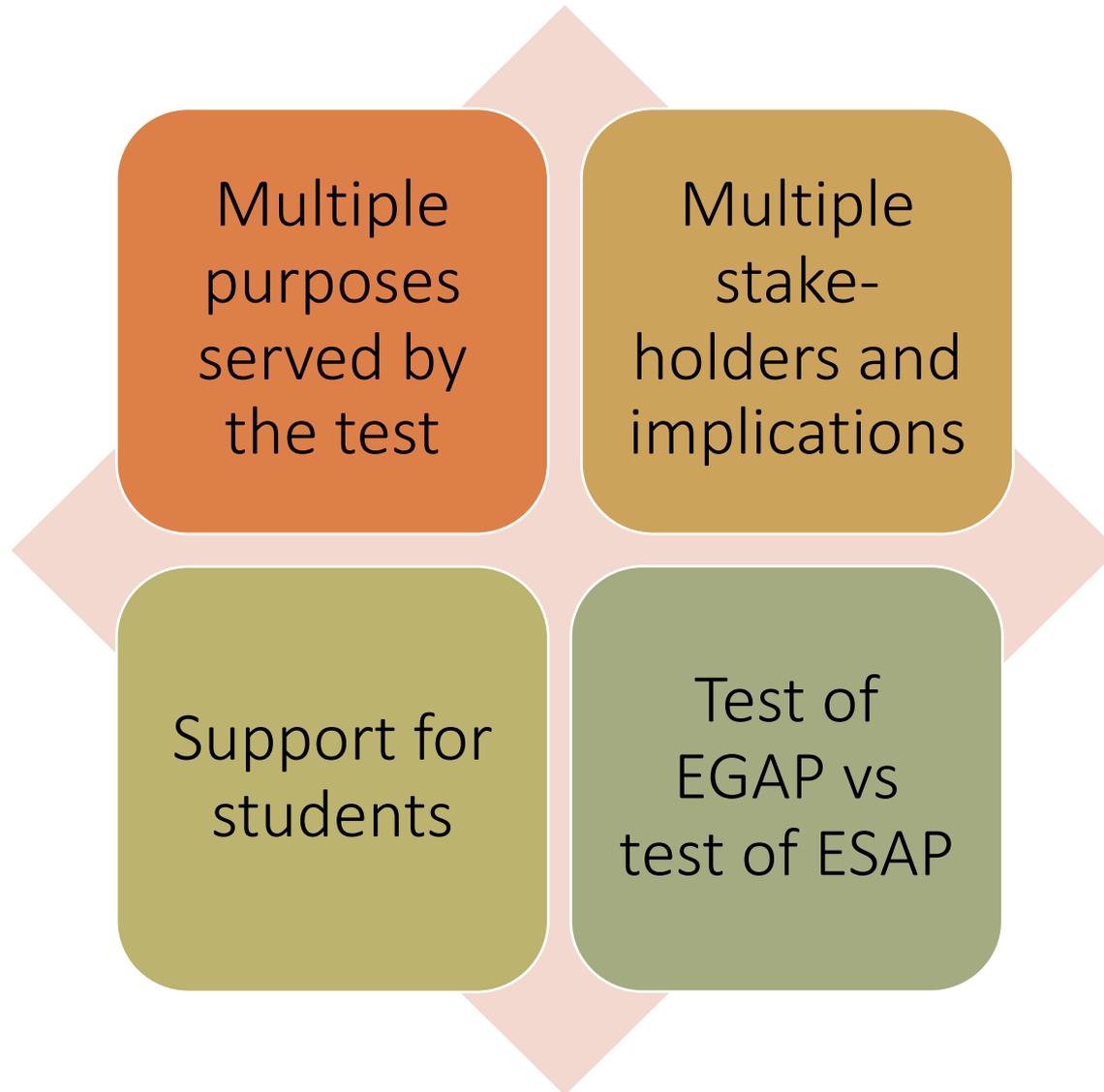
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Issues with ELPA for RPGs



Three purposes of ELPA for RPGs

Proficiency test

Ascertaining individuals' proficiency levels

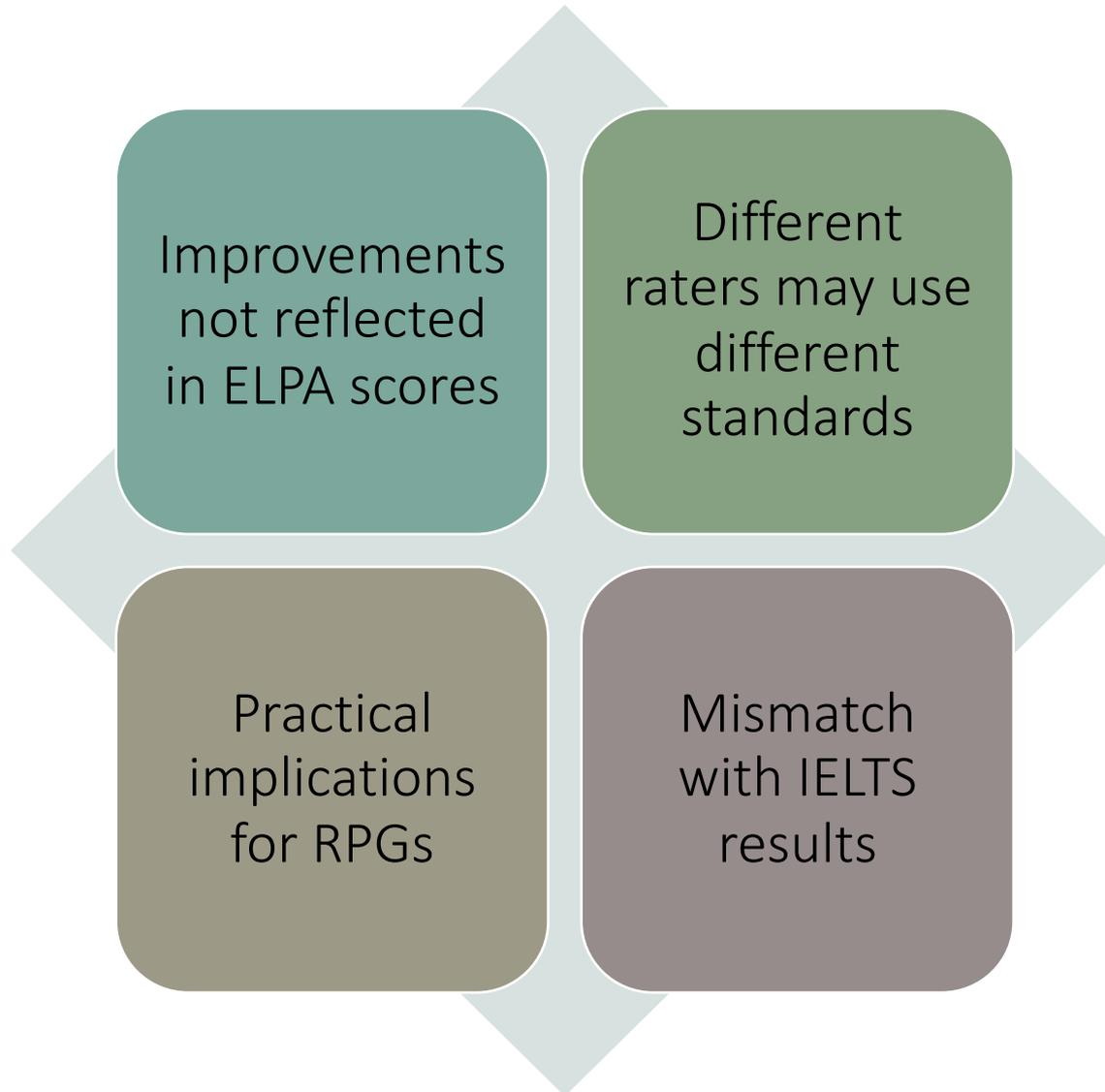
Diagnostic test

Identifying areas for improvements

Placement test

Deciding on needs for further support

The letter to the President: Misgivings expressed by RPGs



Multiple stake-holder implications

RPG student

Pursuing academic studies through the medium of English AND serving as a TA in own disciplines

UG students

Benefiting from TA teaching

Relevant department

Making TA arrangements and supporting RPGs in multiple areas

Applied Linguistics

- Test design
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Learning-oriented assessment

Decision-making processes

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Collaboration with stake-holders

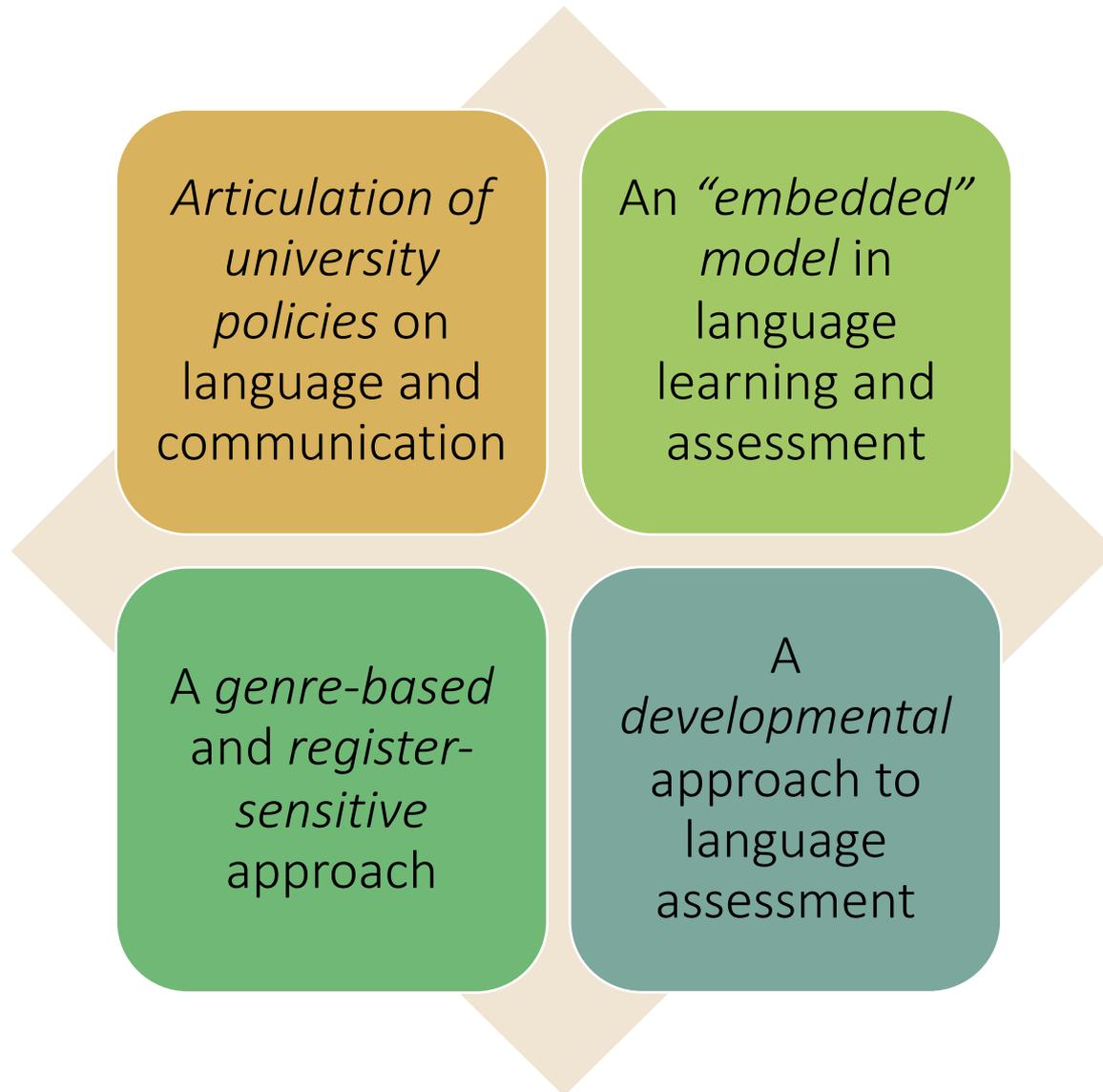
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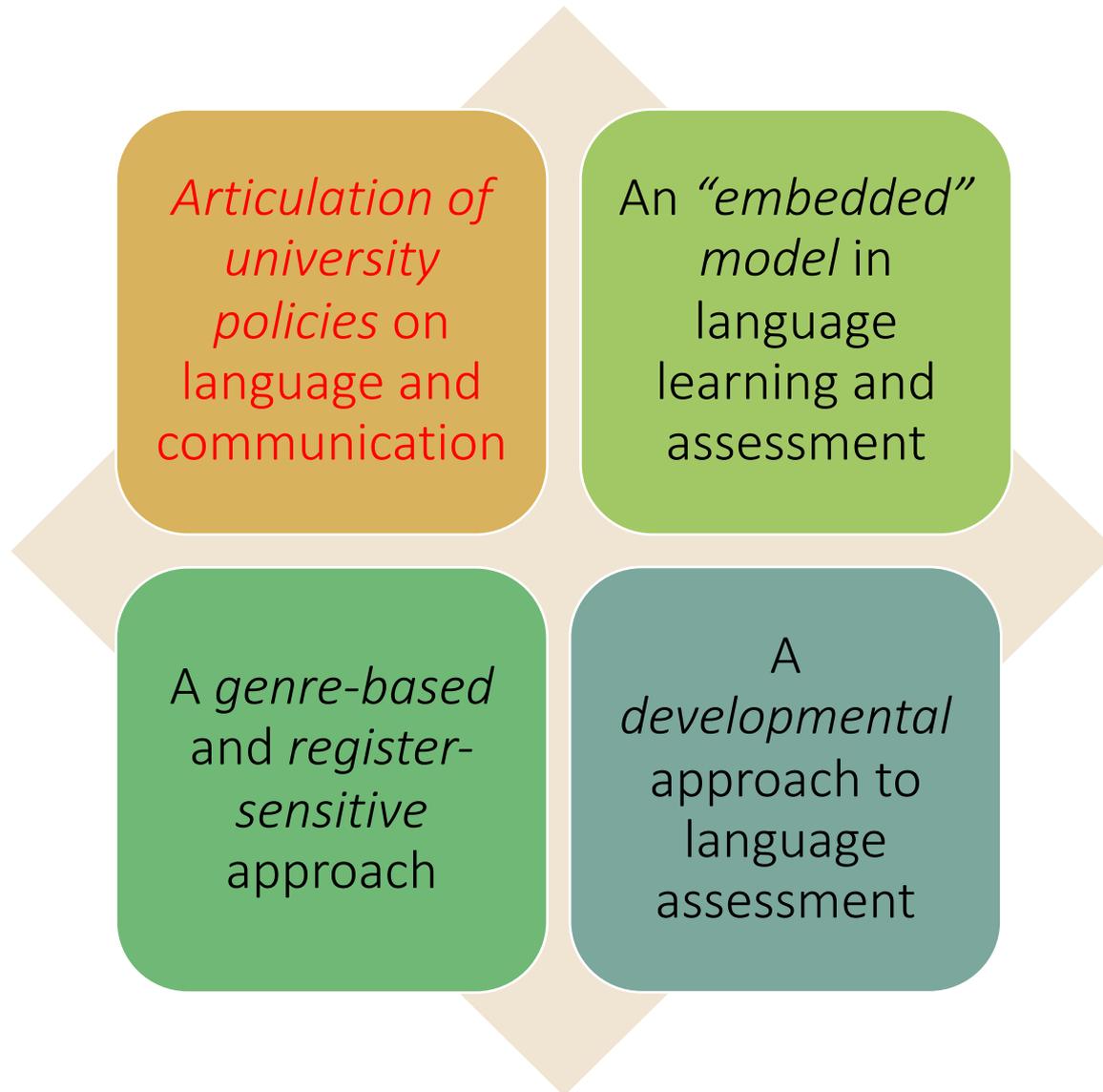
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Re-thinking language assessment in EAP



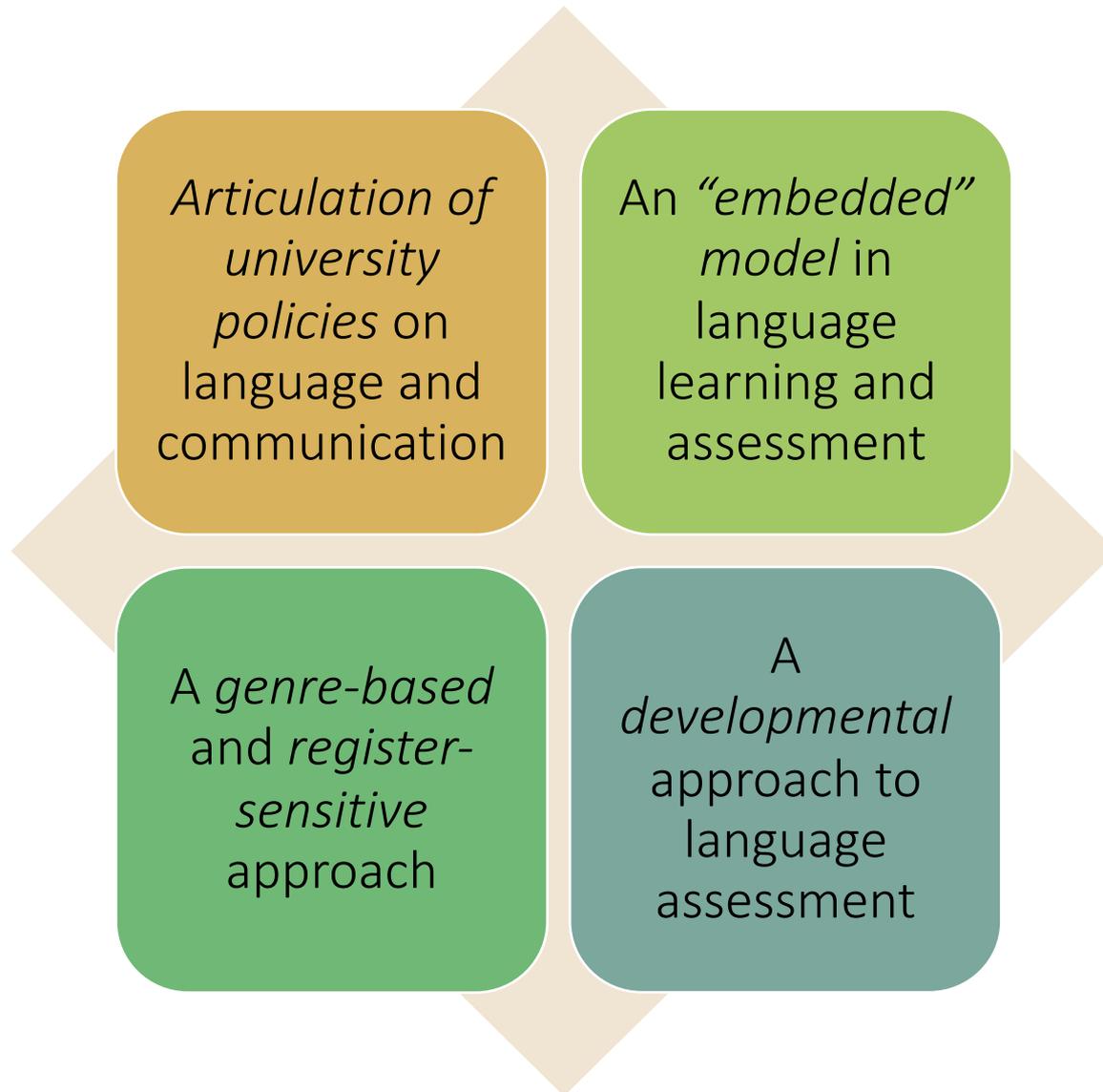
Re-thinking language assessment in EAP



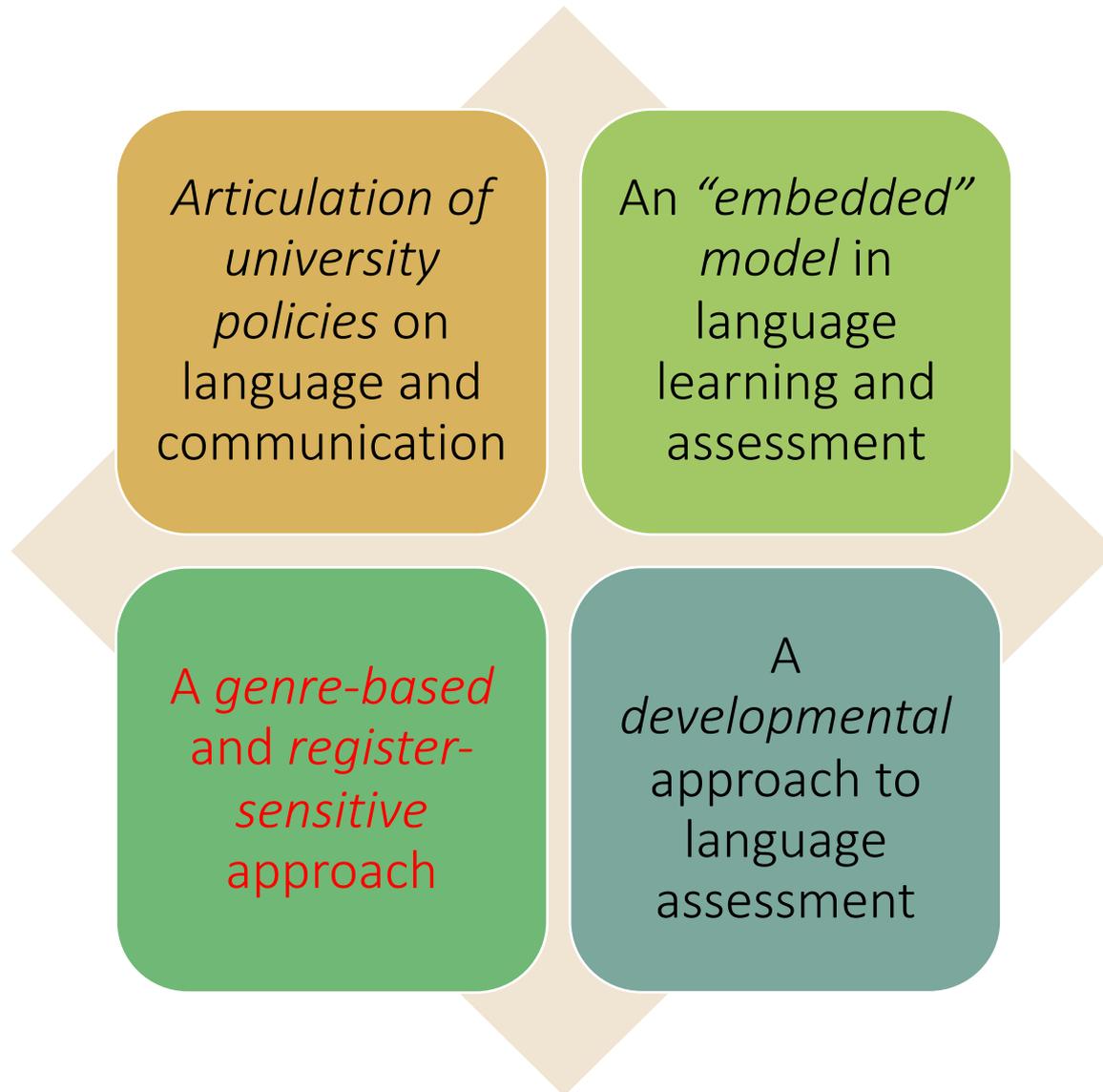
Clear messages sent by universities

On the positive side, a PELA can signal to various stakeholders a commitment on the part of the university to be responsive to the English language needs of incoming students by identifying those at risk of poor academic performance at an early stage. Potentially, it **enhances the reputation of the institution** if it is seen to be fulfilling its duty of care to the students. Assuming that students being admitted to the university through various pathways all take the same assessment, the PELA also **provides an equitable basis for allocating English language tutoring and other specialist resources to the students who are most at risk**. Thus, if the commitment is genuinely made, it reflects well on the institution in meeting its **ethical responsibilities to a linguistically diverse student body**. (Read, 2016, 222-223)

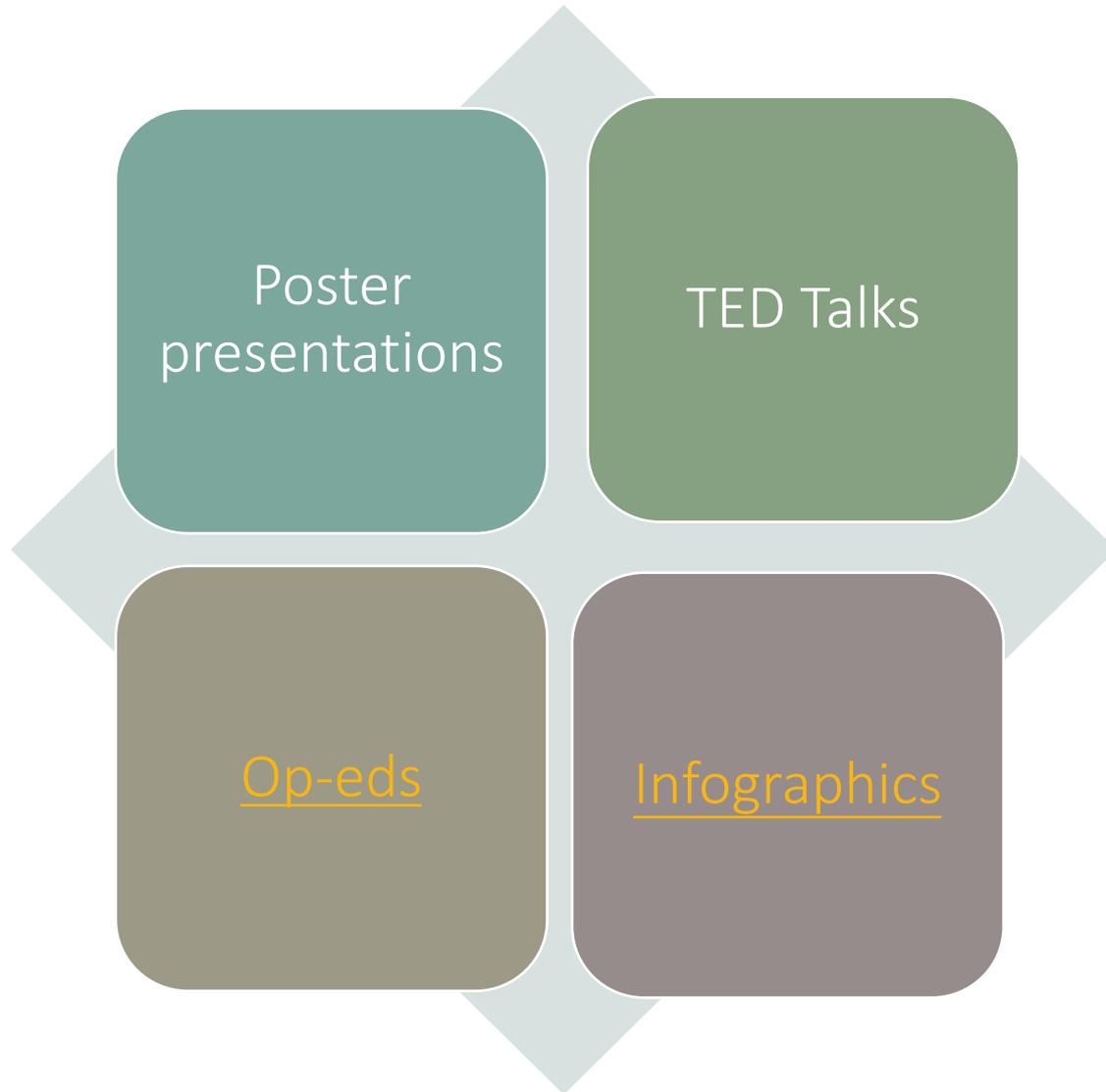
Re-thinking language assessment in EAP



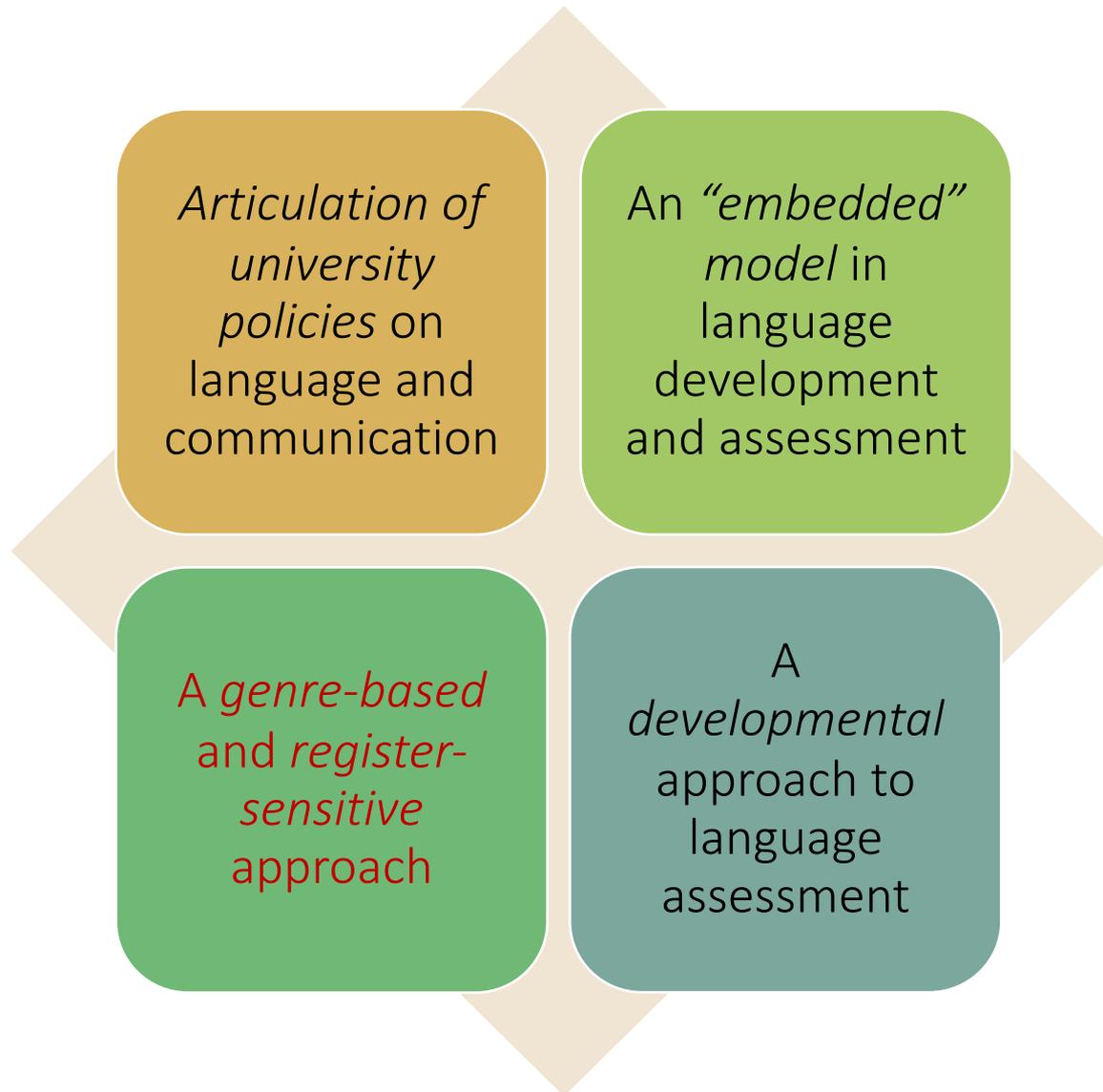
Re-thinking language assessment in EAP



New genres



Re-thinking language assessment in EAP



Register Theory (Derewianka, 1990)

Tenor

- The relationship between the participants: speaker/listener; writer/reader

Field

- The subject matter of the text

Mode

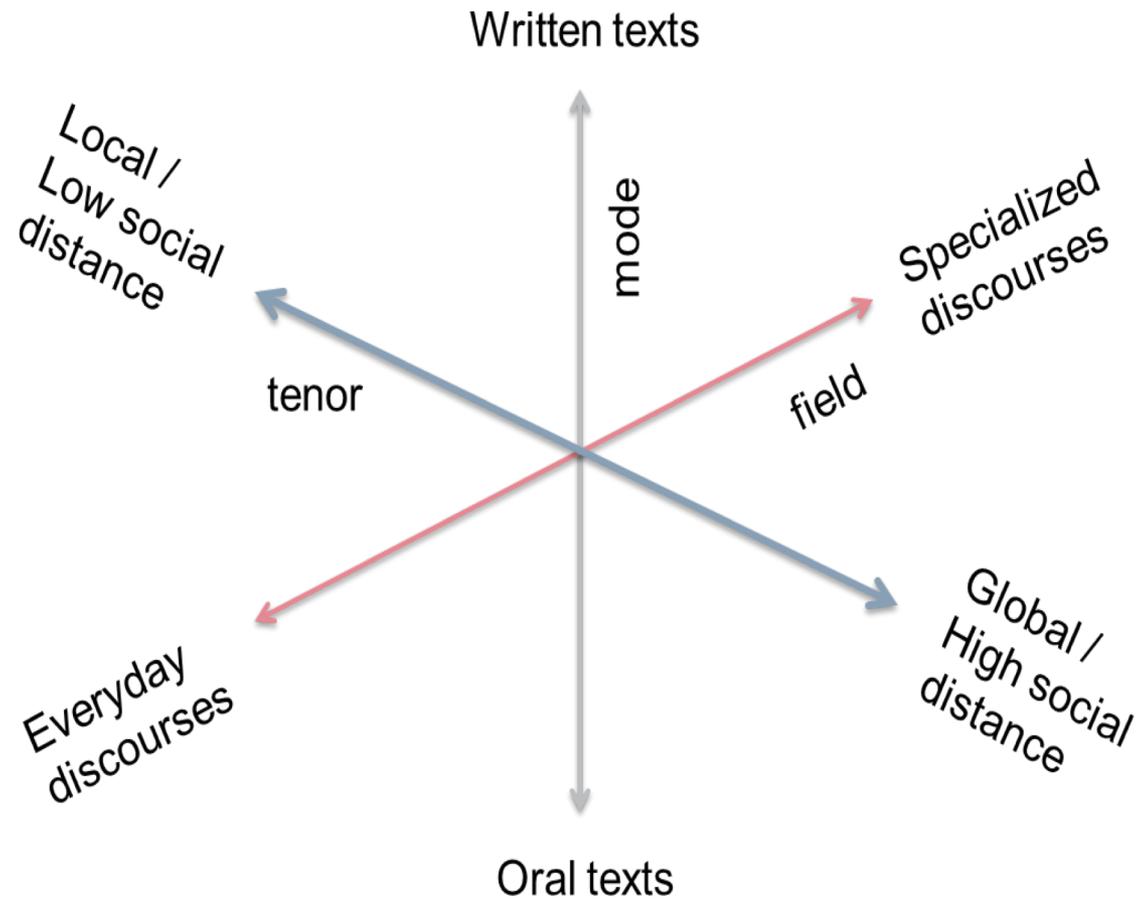
- The channel of communication: written or spoken

We can more fruitfully think of language as a repertoire of genres and registers which are chosen according to the overall communicative purpose and the aspects of field, tenor and mode in different contexts of communication. (Lin, 2016: 19)

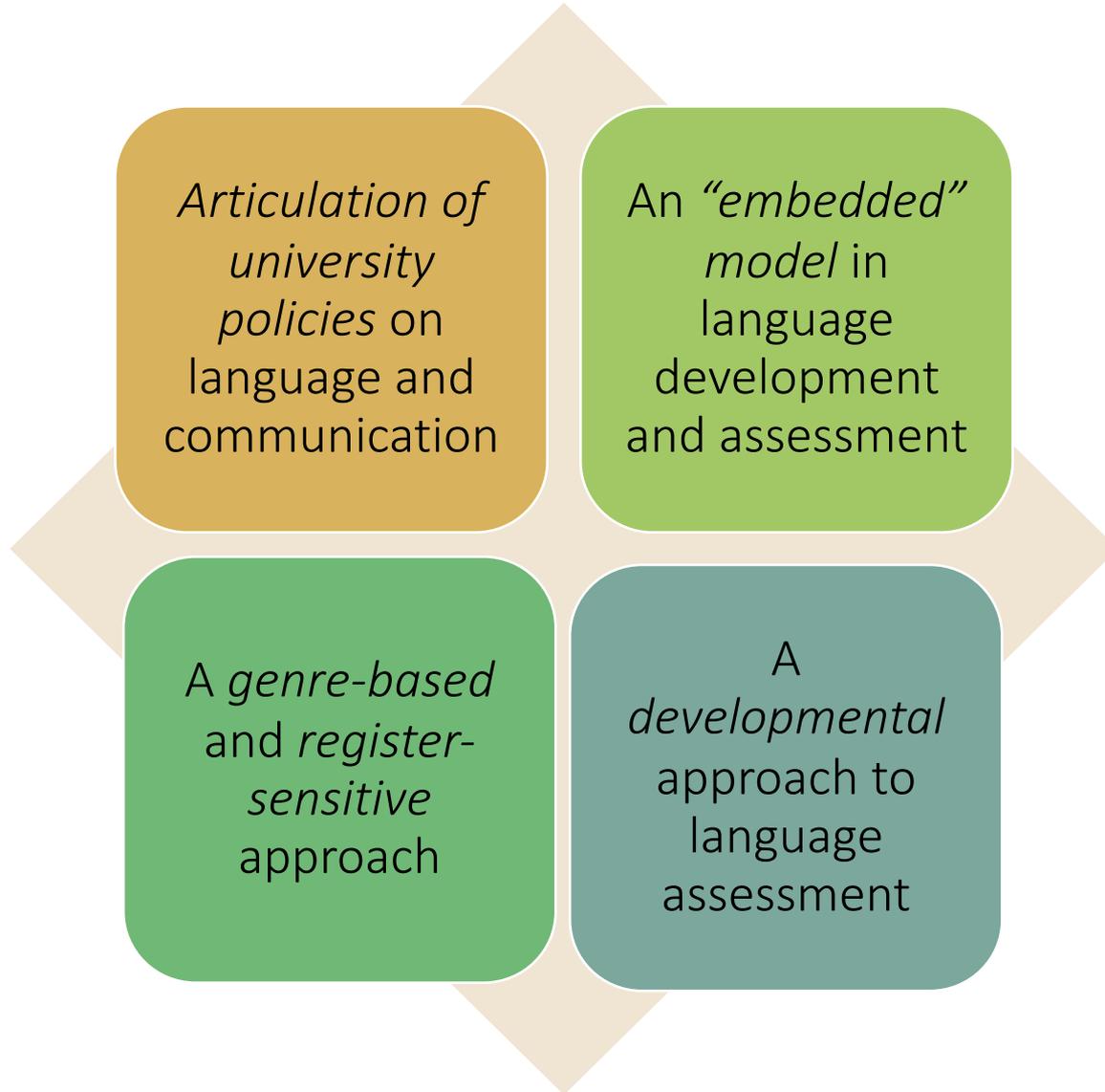
Crisscrossing the spoken-written continuum with the continuum of social distance



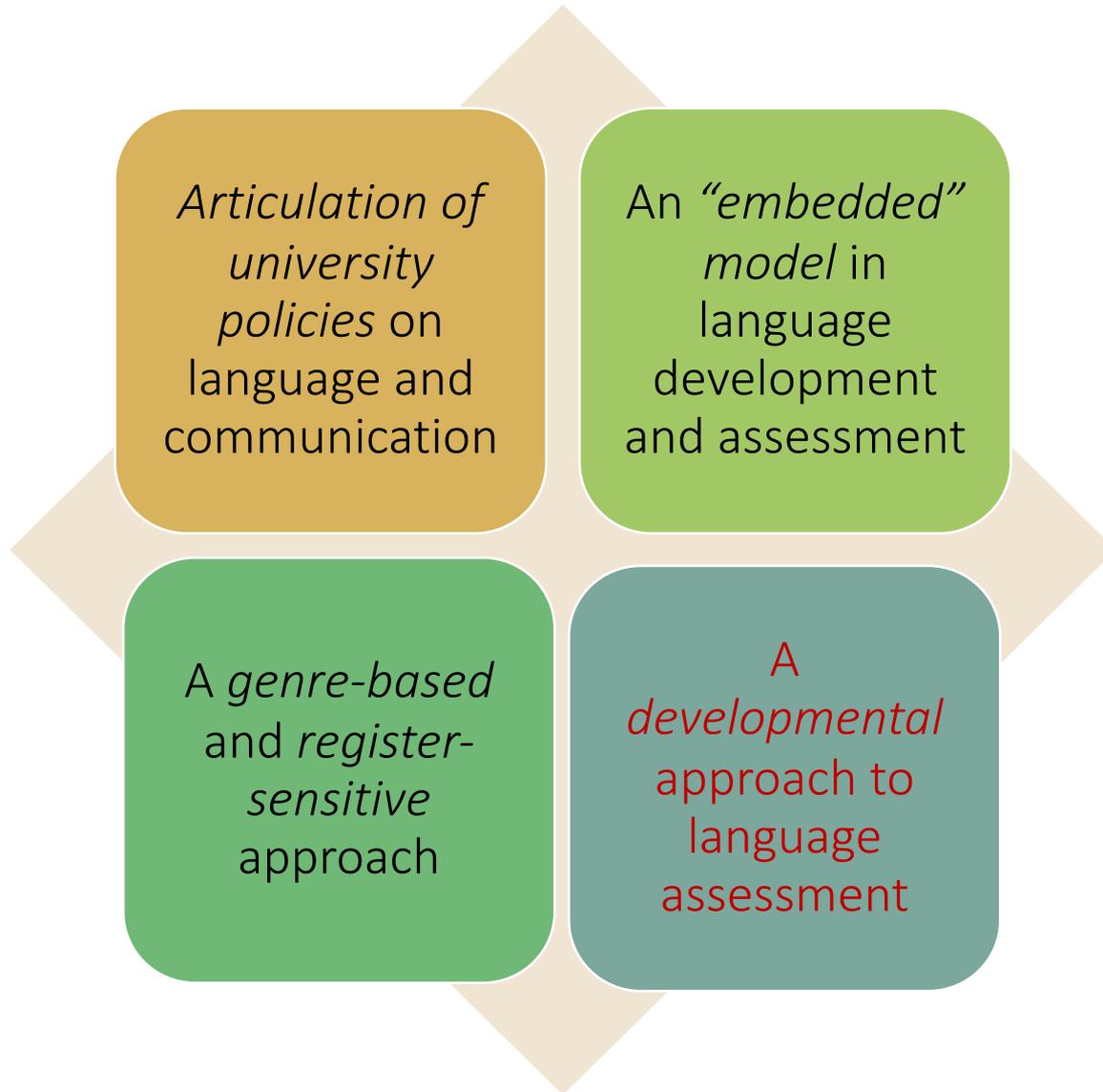
The Mohboobian Framework – towards a model of language variation for education



Re-thinking language assessment in EAP



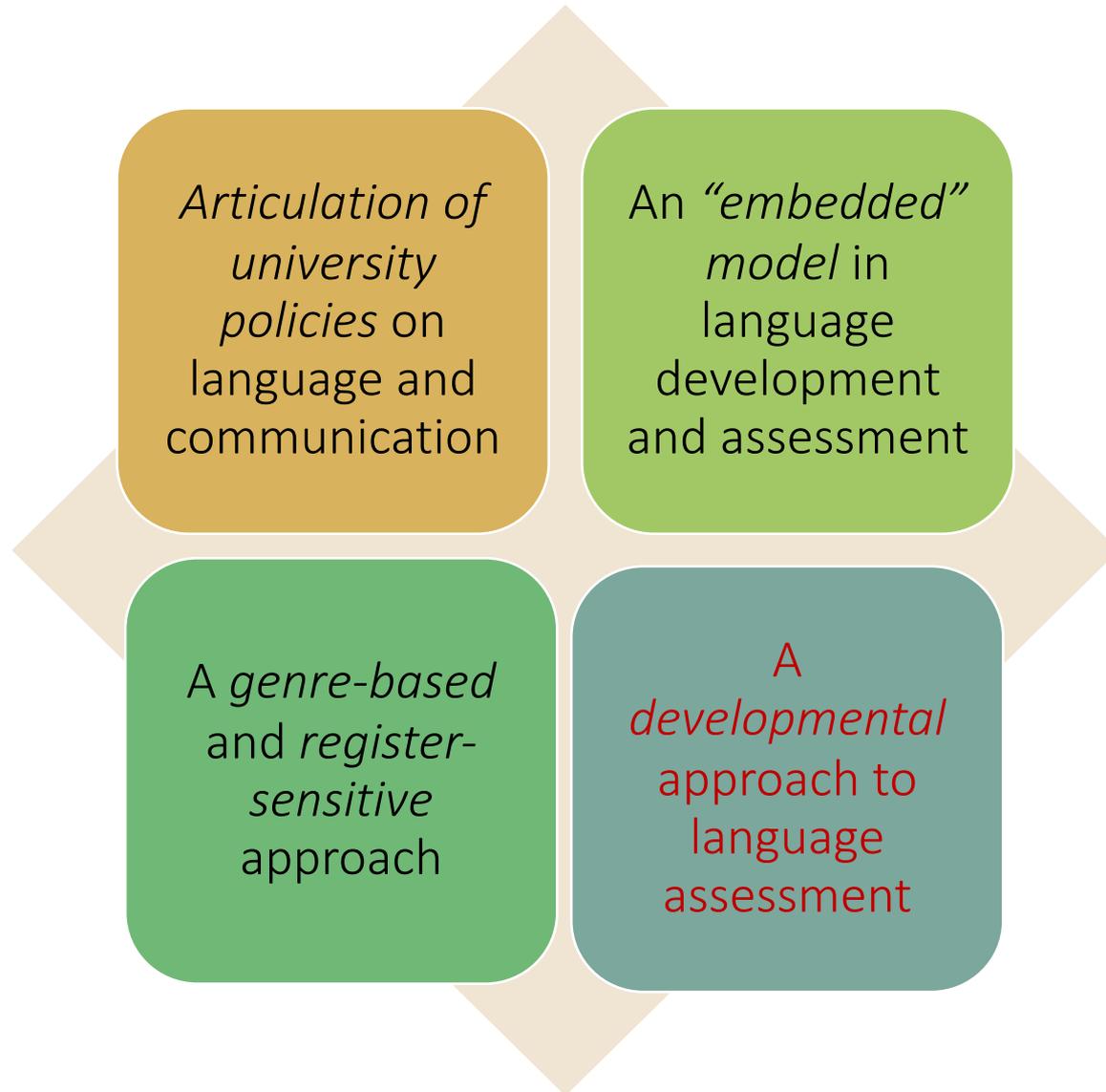
Re-thinking language assessment in EAP



Assessing multilingual competencies

It is time for the language profession to think of **a construct that will better match current research and knowledge** and not serve ideologies of nation-states that interested mostly in homogeneous and monolingual citizens. These constructs need to incorporate the **specific and unique competencies** that demonstrate the advantages that bilingual students have in a number of areas, in spite of not being proficient in the *dominant* language. Language testers should take the role of resistance 'from below' to imposed ideologies and **invent creative ways of testing**, which reflect the diverse populations in this day and age and provide equal participation not limited to dominant languages and dominant people. (Shohamy, 2011, 428)

Re-thinking language assessment in EAP



ELF and International Proficiency Tests

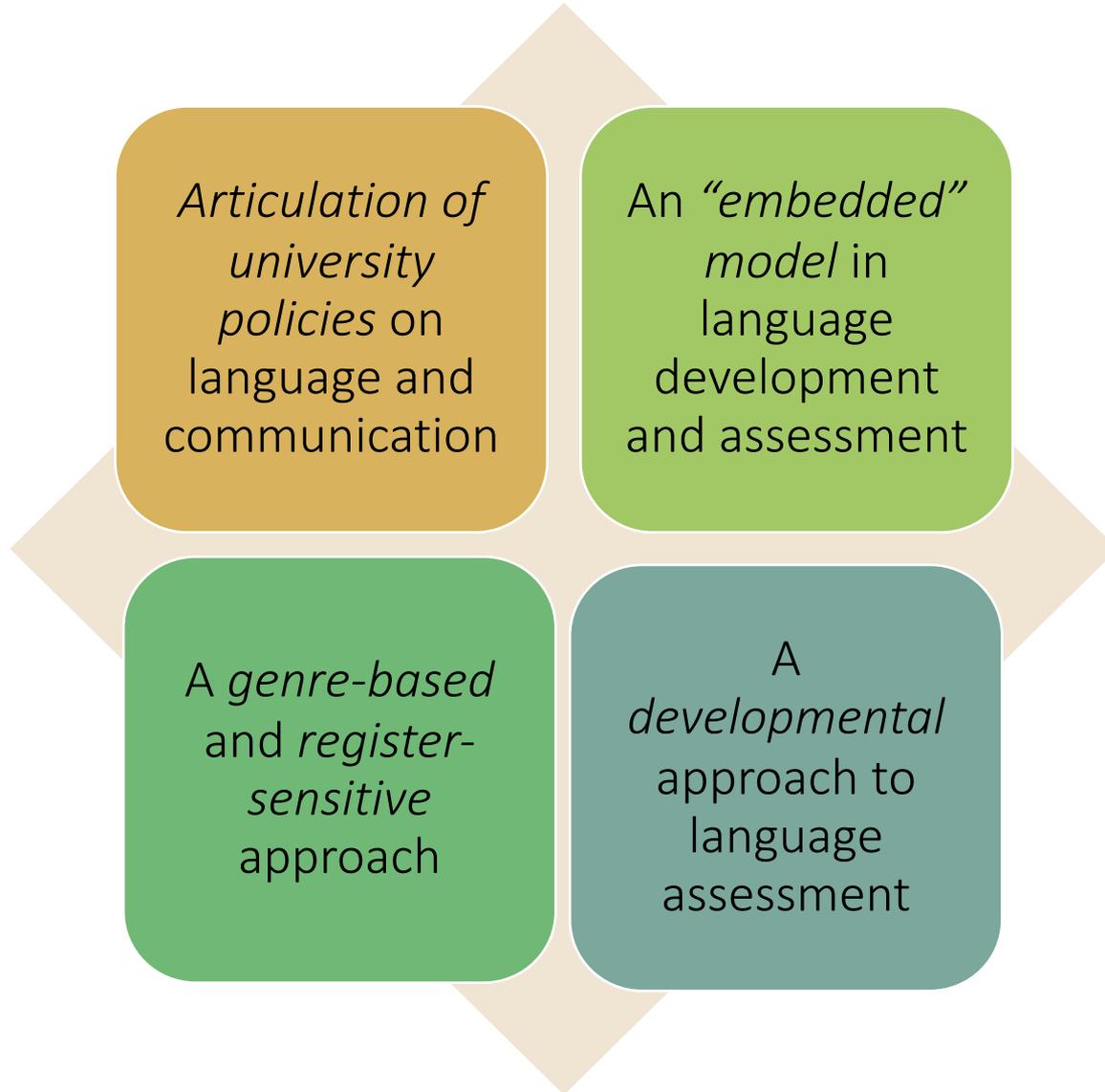
Jenkins... is particularly critical of the role of the international English proficiency tests (IELTS, TOEFL, Pearson Test of English (PTE) in their gate-keeping role for entry to EMI degree programmes. She and others... argue that these and other tests of English for academic purposes serve to perpetuate the dominance of standard native-speaker English, to the detriment of ELF users, by requiring a high degree of linguistic accuracy, by associating an advanced level of proficiency with facility in idiomatic expression, and by not assessing the intercultural negotiating skills which are a key component of communication in English across linguistic boundaries... (Read, 2016, 230)

ELF and post-admission assessments

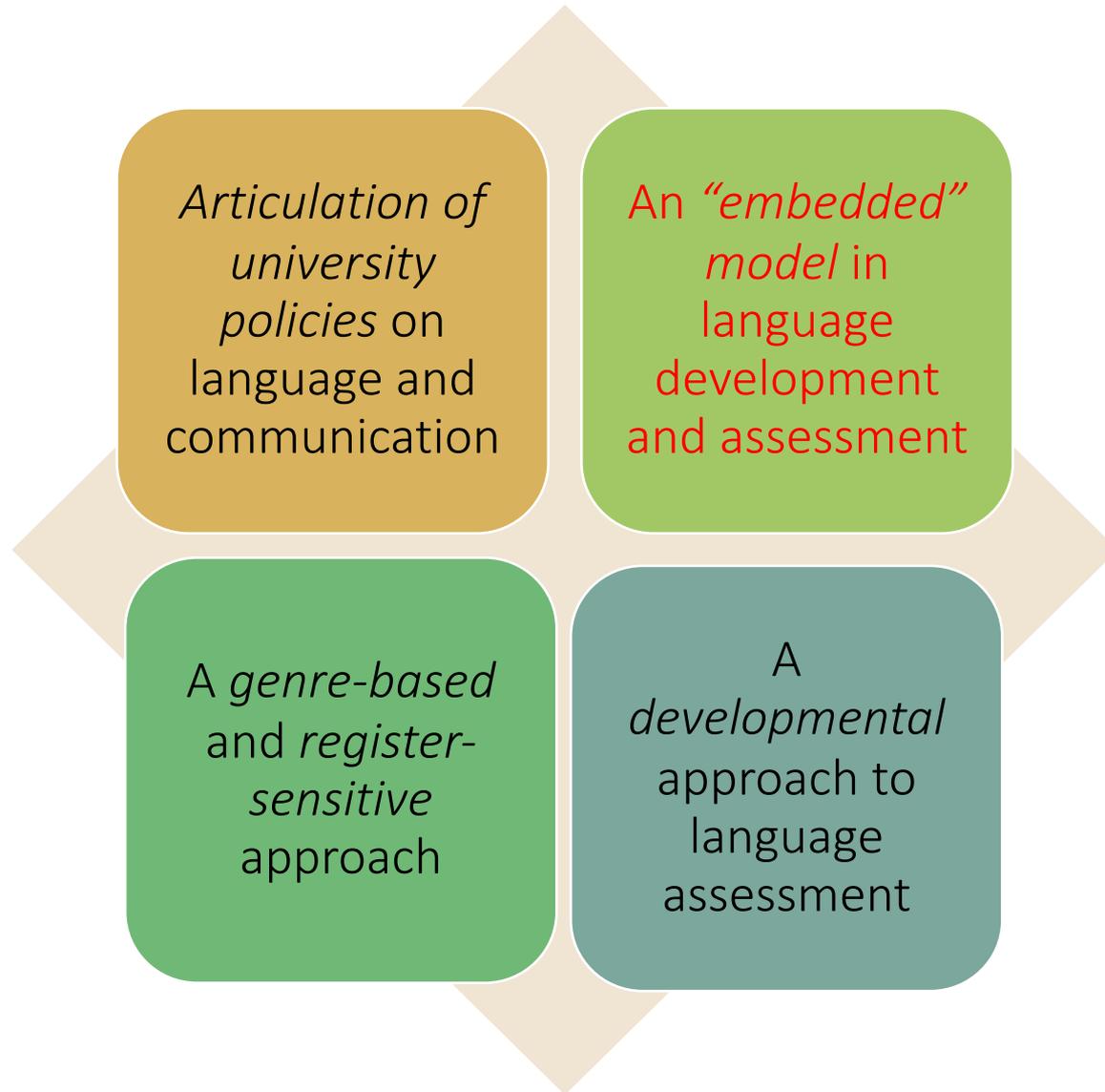
...post-admission assessments developed for particular universities can complement the major tests by representing **flexible responses to local circumstances** and to changing ideas about appropriate forms of assessment, such as those associated with ELF...

Perhaps the most revealing finding from Jenkins' (2013) surveys was the extent to which academics in the UK and in EMI institutions elsewhere defined academic standards in traditional terms which favoured native-speaking students, and many appeared **insensitive to ways in which they could modify their teaching and supervisory practices to accommodate international students**, without “dumbing down” the curriculum... If an assessment is implemented in such an environment, it may basically perpetuate a deficit model of students' language needs, which places the onus squarely on them... to “improve their English”, rather than **being part of a broader commitment to the promotion of high standards of academic literacy for all students, regardless of their language background**. (Read, 2016, 231)

Re-thinking language assessment in EAP



Re-thinking language assessment in EAP



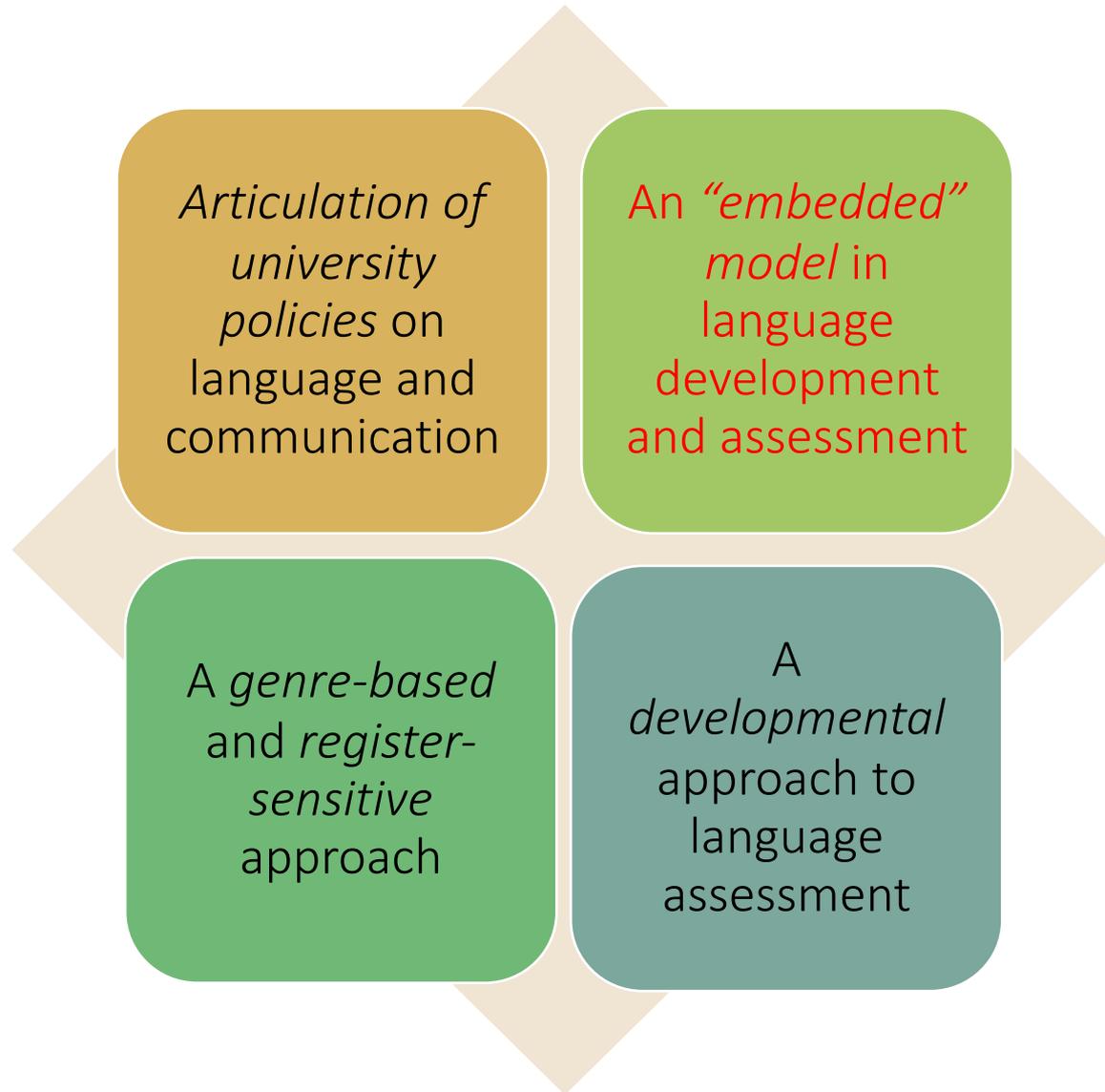
Embedded Language Development

Arkoudis and Kelly cite studies which document “the limitations of communication skills programs which sit outside the disciplinary curricula and are supported by **staff who are not recognized by students as disciplinary academics**” (2016, p.4).

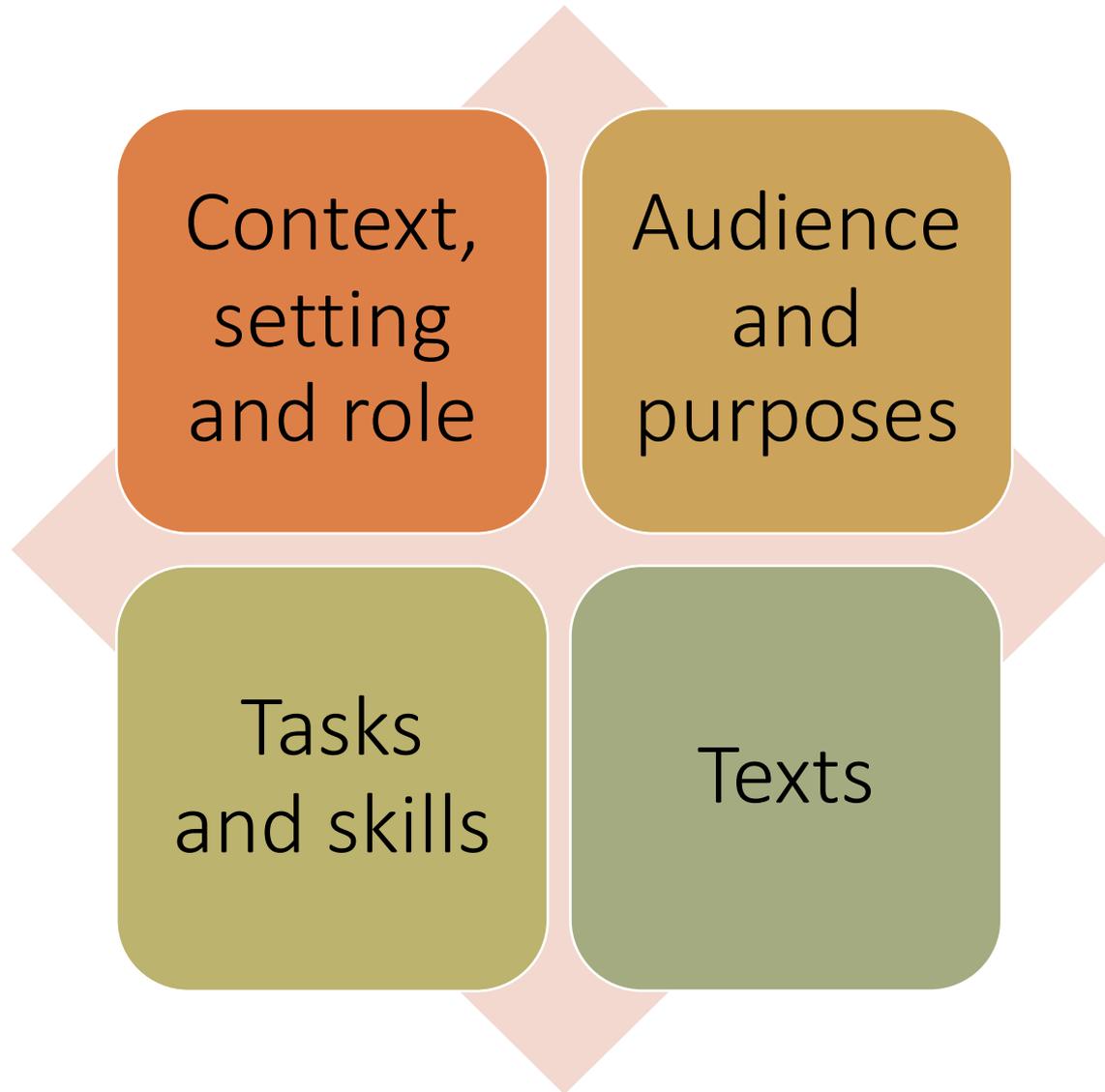
This quote highlights the point that academic English programmes are typically delivered as adjuncts to degree courses by tutors with low (and maybe insecure) status within the institution who may not have the **relevant knowledge of discourse norms to address issues of academic literacy or professional communication skills within the disciplines**.

This suggests that the way forward is to **foster more collaboration** between learning advisors and English language tutors on the one hand and academic teaching staff on the other. (Read, 2016, 227)

Re-thinking language assessment in EAP



ELPA 2 Development at HKUST



Applied Linguistics

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- Reliability
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Collaboration with stake-holders

- Positive washback
- Feedback provision
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- Multiple purposes
- Multiple stakeholder implications

Language Education

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References

Lin, A. (2016). *Language across the curriculum and CLIL in English as an additional language (EAL) contexts: Theory and Practice*.

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Read, J. (Ed.). (2016). *Post-admission Language Assessment of University Students*. Switzerland: Springer.

Shohamy, E. (2011). Assessing multilingual competencies: adopting construct valid assessment policies. *The Modern Language Journal*, 95, 3, 418-429.

Thank you very much

