



RESEARCH REPORT

HiringBranch Versus Standardized Language Tests

Go beyond language scores and get better
hiring outcomes.

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A sample of non-native English speakers took both the HiringBranch (HB) and standardized test (ST) assessments. Results for speaking, writing and final score were correlated to compare test validity.

Why Standardized Language Tests Are No Longer Enough

Improve your hiring and say goodbye to standardized language tests. See how assessing candidate skills in addition to language can deliver significantly better hiring results.

- Assess communication and soft skills – not just language
 - Reduce false positives and false negatives
 - Measure spoken fluency more accurately
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BACKGROUND

Language assessments are part of every contact center's hiring toolkit. Whether checking grammar or spoken fluency, the goal of language assessments has been to ensure that an applicant has a basic proficiency level in English or another language.

As the customer expectations increase and contact center technology evolves, the job of the customer service agent is becoming more complex. Is the standardized language test still the right tool to use?

This case study puts standardized language tests to the test! It demonstrates how 'false positives' are created with language tests where the wrong candidate is passed, as well as 'false negatives' where a good candidate is overlooked. This study also shows how a more sophisticated communication assessment can more accurately select frontline customer service agents.

THE CORE DIFFERENCE

“Standardized language tests focus on language proficiency only, whereas HiringBranch adds another layer by assessing communication and soft skills.”

Almost every contact center agent has passed a language test, but how well do they work?

How often have language test results correlated with the candidates' actual performance? Over one billion USD is spent by corporations on language testing every year, representing a significant cost for Talent Acquisition departments. Are they getting value for the dollar?

Research shows that in offshore centers (outside North America and Europe), up to 20% of agents do not have the required language and communication skills to do their job effectively. And across the industry, customer satisfaction levels have declined according to data compiled by the CFI group.

THE COST OF A FALSE POSITIVE

\$1B+

spent on language testing
every year

20%

of offshore agents lack the
skills to do the job

One of the biggest challenges facing the recruiting industry is to both fill seats AND provide an accurate screen. Even one poor hire who lacks language skills (a 'false positive') and has to be trained can represent a significant cost to the organization. The same is true if they are shifted into another position or let go.

Similarly, in a competitive job market, no employer wants to pass over quality candidates who may fail a standard language test for the wrong reasons.

The two tests selected different candidates for passing.

A sample of non-native English speakers took both the HB and ST tests and the results were compared. To see how incorporating communication skills into a test affected test validity, we looked at the following data:

The results for speaking and writing, as well as the final score for each test was correlated. While there was some correlation in writing, there were lower correlations for speaking and final score, which means that the tests selected different candidates for passing. The main reasons for these results are outlined below.

TABLE 1

Communication Skills Score

Correlation of each test’s speaking, writing and final scores with the communication skills score.

TEST	SCORE		CORRELATION
HB	Speaking Score		0.86
	Writing score		0.96
	Final score		0.75
ST	Speaking score		0.47
	Wrinting score		0.87
	Final score		0.68

HB = HiringBranch. ST = standardized language test.

REASON ONE

Communication Skills

Standardized Language Tests (ST) focus on language proficiency only whereas HiringBranch (HB) adds another layer on top of that in which soft skills are assessed. For example, not only is language proficiency assessed, but also skills, like paying attention to detail, acknowledging customer concerns, the ability to perform under pressure, use of positive language, etc.

That means, HB not only checks how the candidate says things but also what they say. The assessment is completed using real scenarios that imitate the candidate's upcoming position, allowing proper evaluation to determine if the candidate is a fit for the intended environment.

HB not only checks how the candidate says things,

but also what they say.

REASON TWO

Spoken Fluency

The second issue that accounts for the imperfect correlation between HB and ST speaking tests (and by extension between the final scores of both tests) is the reliability of the spoken fluency measurements in each of the tests.

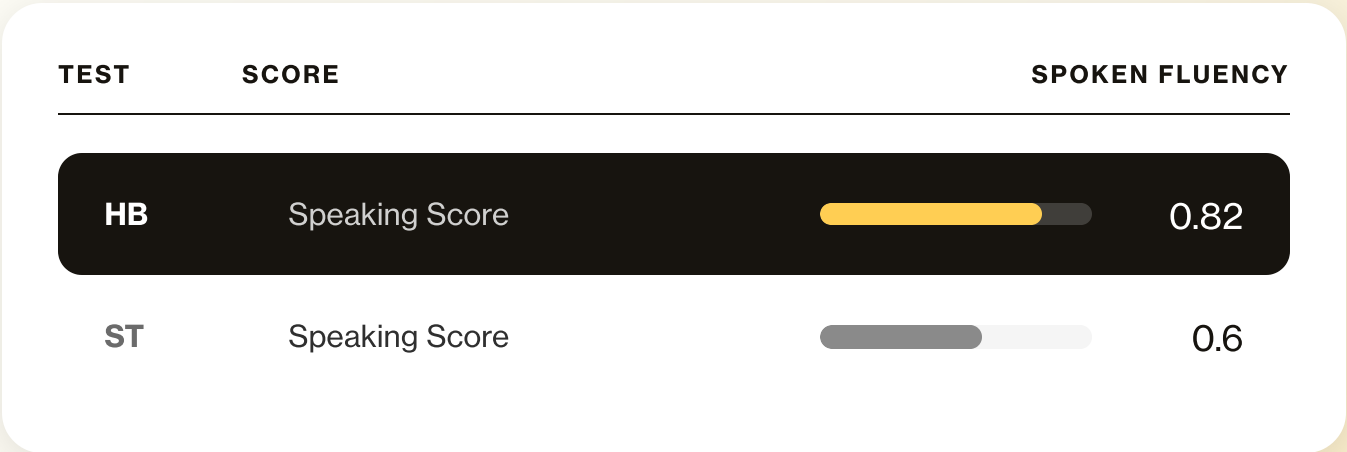
To enable a fair comparison, the results were manually scored for spoken fluency and pronunciation separately by two people. Their manual scores were then averaged to better represent the candidate's spoken fluency.



TABLE 2

Correlation Coefficient Between Fluency and Test Scores

Each speaking score correlated against spoken fluency, scored manually by two people and averaged.



Fluency is an important component of ‘intelligibility’, or the ability for a listener to easily understand a speaker without having to ask for clarifications. It is separate from accent or pronunciation and is a key factor in how smoothly a spoken conversation can be conducted.

Contact centers hiring for customer service excellence need more than standard language tests can offer

Despite the high correlation between candidates' scores in HB and ST tests, we have shown three major differences between the two tests.

THREE MAJOR DIFFERENCES

- 01 While both HB and ST evaluate linguistic proficiency, HB's test adds a layer of assessment that accounts for the candidate's communication and soft skills. This layer contributes dramatically to the prediction of the candidate's chances to succeed in their prospective work.
 - 02 HB achieves more reliable results in scoring candidates' spoken fluency.
 - 03 HB is the only test that analyses the candidates' reading and listening abilities, two crucial components in the candidates' future work.
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Learn More About HiringBranch

HiringBranch is an award-winning AI-powered talent assessment platform headquartered in Canada with global operations. Trusted by enterprise organizations including Bell Canada and Infosys, HiringBranch helps frontline and high-volume hiring teams identify top talent faster - before the first interview. By assessing candidates' critical thinking, communication, and soft skills at 98% accuracy, HiringBranch gives recruiters a clear picture of who can actually do the job, reducing time-to-fill, bad hires, and attrition. Founded in 2022, HiringBranch has delivered over one million assessments worldwide and stands behind every hire with a results guarantee.

98%

scoring accuracy

1M+

assessments delivered

80+

ATS integrations



TOO BUSY FOR A DEMO? TEST DRIVE THE ASSESSMENT ON YOUR OWN.

hello@hiringbranch.com

HB = HiringBranch. ST = standardized language test. Spoken fluency and pronunciation were scored manually and separately by two people, then averaged.

