



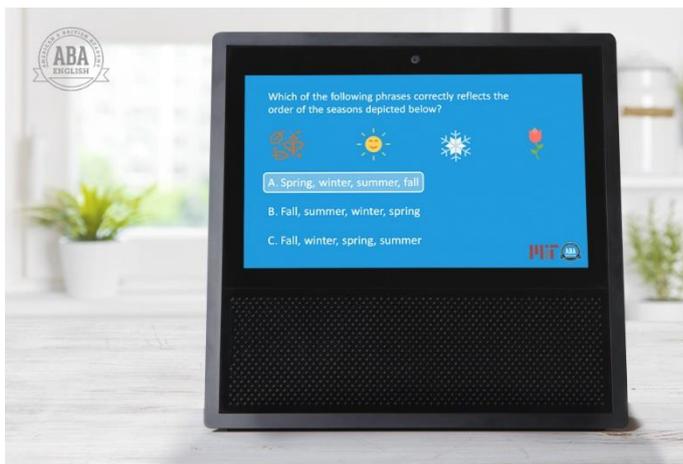
Special collaboration between ABA English and the MIT

***English Test* on Alexa: The First Test to Assess English Proficiency by Simulating a Human Conversation**

- *The user interacts vocally with Alexa, thanks to the artificial intelligence behind Amazon's virtual assistant*
- *The project is conducted jointly by a team of MIT Auto-ID Lab developers and ABA English Language Lab linguists*
- *Artificial intelligence will revolutionize online learning of English by allowing to converse with a machine, a first step towards personalized learning*

Barcelona, 23rd April, 2018.- The online English-language school [ABA English](#) and the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Auto-ID Lab** have jointly developed an [innovative English proficiency test](#) that interacts conversationally with Alexa, Amazon's virtual assistant.

English Test is the first Alexa skill that allows users to **assess their English level through the voice recognition** technology of Amazon's well-known assistant, which is so far only available in the USA, Germany and UK.



In addition to assessing English language proficiency, **English Test** also provides broader learning opportunities to practice listening and speaking, since users can do the exercises by verbally interacting with Alexa while also doing other things (cooking, sports, etc).

A team of **MIT Auto-Id Lab developers and ABA English Language Lab linguists** is behind this innovative level test, currently

available in Beta version for free in the Amazon store worldwide. The *English Test* skill operates on the Alexa Echo Show device, the most advanced of the Echo range of devices (also Echo Dot, Echo Spot and Echo Look) that includes a 7.4-inch screen.

The test is adaptive and so **adjusts to the level it identifies in each user**, and it is designed to collect information on the student's profile, interests and motivations to learn English. Thus, the user enjoys a **completely personalized experience**: each answer

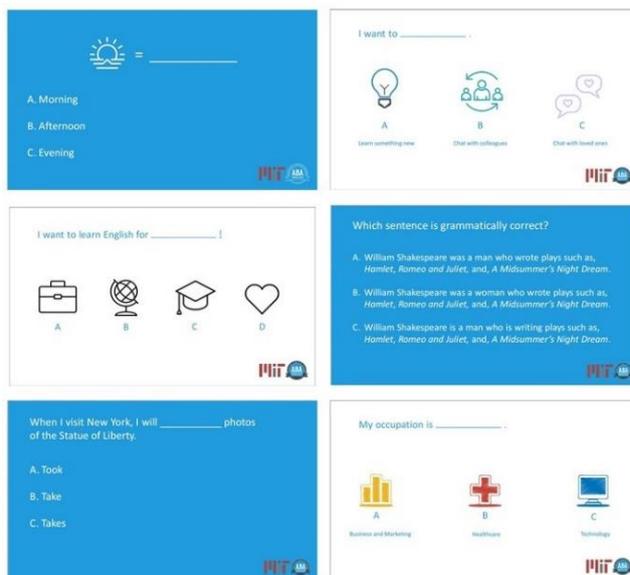


given to a profile question opens up a new path of proficiency and profile questions adjusted to the user's interests and preferences.

This combination of profile and proficiency questions is unique and keeps students engaged throughout the test. And the more the English Test skill is used, the more attuned to the specific user its questions will be (thanks to machine learning). Thus, **users feel like they are having a conversation rather than responding to questions, and that they are interacting with an ABA English teacher instead of a machine.** Even though she is a machine, Alexa's voice and individually customized questions generate the feeling of "human" interaction.

As an adaptive exam that improves with increased use over time, *English Test* with Alexa represents a **first step towards personalized English-language learning content**, a growing trend in the digital learning industry.

How *English Test* works



Like all other skills, English Test is activated verbally by saying "Alexa, start English Test." Alexa makes a brief introduction providing instructions on how to respond to questions, and interacts vocally with the user throughout the entire process.

Alexa reads each question and possible answers. The user must say the letter corresponding to the correct answer and verbalize the sentence or full answer. For example: (A) - *I want to learn English to travel.*

While doing the test users do not know if they are answering correctly, in order to avoid frustration and drop-outs before

completion. After answering a certain amount of questions incorrectly, a user will unknowingly be restricted to a pool of questions that are based on the level they failed at, as well as one level below.

At the end of the test, Alexa announces the student's level placement. The ABA English course is based on six levels corresponding to A1-C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), so Alexa will describe what the student will learn on the level they have been assigned, according to CEFR.

English Test, first AI project for ABA English's Language Lab

The *English Test* project being developed by ABA English and the MIT is part of the Language Lab's research activities. Language Lab is the online school's R&D centre and *English Test* is one of its most innovative projects to date, being the first firm step into the field of artificial intelligence applied to learning a second language.

The **Language Lab** conducts **innovative language-learning research, and identifies and develops improvements in both technology and methodology.** It is a creative



laboratory and research centre that brings together linguists, technology and digital-learning experts from leading universities around the world. Maria Perillo, ABA English's Chief Learning Officer, directs the Lab in collaboration with an Academic Committee composed of reputed university professors among whom is Brian Subirana, director of the MIT Auto-Id Lab.

"English Test is a unique and revolutionary project that opens the door to a new way of understanding and developing online learning," said Maria Perillo, Chief Learning Officer at ABA English. *"Alexa is designed for use in open spaces, away from the computer or mobile and while you're doing other activities, so it adapts to the context you're using it in: learning moments are increased and the possibilities for personalization are enormous."*

MIT Auto-Id Lab, breakthrough technology for society

The MIT's research centre Auto-Id Lab was created in 1999 to advance in the field of RFID (radio-frequency identification) as the basis of the architecture for the Internet of Things. The lab researches and develops new technologies pioneering the future and providing previously unrealizable benefits to consumers and society.

Brian Subirana, director of the MIT Auto-ID Laboratory and an engineer, holds a PhD in Artificial Intelligence and an MBA, and teaches at the MIT and Harvard. He currently leads research teams focusing on developing disruptive technologies for five industries, including digital learning.

"At MIT's Auto-Id Lab we're used to working in uncharted waters, developing products that will represent a leap forward in innovation, such as English Test: the first proficiency test to assess your English level by simulating a conversation between human beings," said Brian Subirana, MIT Auto-Id Lab director. *"With this project we're paving the way for artificial intelligence applied to language learning, so that personalized learning can be delivered through virtual assistants such as Alexa."*

Alexa, Amazon's virtual assistant

Amazon's virtual assistant Alexa engages with users via voice recognition: you speak to Alexa and she replies. The English Test created by ABA English and the MIT is the first skill to allow users to conversationally assess their English proficiency thanks to Amazon's device.

Alexa currently only "understands and speaks" English and German, which explains that the device is so far unavailable in countries with other languages. The applications enabled for Alexa are called skills, since the machine is taught and provided with the ability to communicate with humans. The 15 million American users who already own an Alexa device have access to some 10.000 skills, allowing them to find and buy products, listen to music, recall their agenda for the day among other things. And, from now on, if they don't yet speak English, they can discover what level they should start learning English at.

About ABA English

ABA English is an online English language school with millions of students in over 170 countries and the leading provider of digital English in South Europe and Latin America. It is distinguished by its



teaching methodology, the ABA Natural Method, which translates the principles of natural mother-tongue learning to the digital space and uses high quality short films produced in-house.

A renowned startup of the EdTech industry, ABA English was awarded “Best Educational App” by Reimagine Education and has been featured by Apple and Google as one of the best educational apps. Furthermore, in 2016 it became the first digital academy to be authorised to issue Cambridge English certificates. Based in Barcelona, its team is made up of more than 80 professionals from 20 nationalities.

For further information: www.abaenglish.com or mobile: [AppStore](#) o [GooglePlay](#).