

### ***Exploring Language Assessment and Testing: Language in Action***

Anthony Green. New York: Routledge. 2013. Pp. 288.

Many of the current textbooks on language testing in use today take a broad approach covering theory of language ability, test development, and test evaluation, including statistical computations. In his new book, *Exploring Language Assessment and Testing*, Anthony Green successfully presents an overview of past and current issues in language testing with a focus on classroom-based assessment. With an eye toward promoting assessment literacy, Green has written in a way that is easy to understand as well as intellectually engaging. This book is part of the *Introductions to Applied Linguistics* series by Routledge, which is intended for graduate students in teacher-education courses. Without a doubt, the novice reader will find the material informative and useful.

*Exploring Language Assessment and Testing* is divided into three parts beginning with practical aspects of assessment literacy, continuing on to theoretical issues, and ending with avenues for language assessment research and further study. The first of four chapters in Part I covers basic concepts and distinctions in assessment, testing, and language learning with a focus on language assessment in educational contexts. The chapter concludes with a discussion of why and how languages are learned and how language learning is assessed. The author points out the variety of purposes for learning a language and warns of the unintended consequences of improper use and/or interpretation of language assessment.

Appealing to the intended audience for this book, Chapter 2 continues the list of current relevant issues in language assessment by drawing a distinction between assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning in an educational context. Green distinguishes between educational assessment and proficiency assessment, yet points out that task types from one context can be adapted for use in the other. A fundamental issue presented in this chapter is that because learning and assessment are so intertwined, it is necessary for teachers to become familiar with language testing in order to evaluate the qualities of good assessment practices.

Chapter 3 describes the practical stages of test development, as well as the role of educators who are involved in the assessment cycle. Keeping with the themes of educational assessment and assessment literacy, Green points out that teachers should be involved in some if not all stages of test development in order to gain confidence in evaluating assessments. One technique that Green uses to assist learners new to language assessment is providing easy to read charts, images, and acronyms to help readers remember a few basic principles for the development of assessment literacy and quality assessment practices. A systematic explanation of these principles facilitates understanding of the issues in the test development cycle. Furthermore, Green makes the argument that assessment should complement learning. One suggestion to accomplish this goal is to view task specifications as course learning objectives, both of which require adequate description in order to be taught and assessed appropriately.

While Chapter 3 focuses on developing assessments, Chapter 4 explores a much less understood aspect of language testing, namely, evaluating the use of assessments. This aspect of language assessment is of particular importance when designing, adapting, or adopting an assessment task or test. After introducing basic components of test evaluation, practicality and reliability, Green briefly describes the development of the concept of validity from its former

meaning of validity as the characteristic of a test measuring “what it purports to measure” through various types of validity (content, criterion-related, and construct), ultimately arriving at the current theory of validity as a unitary concept presented as interpretive and validity arguments. The current theoretical foundation for validation of language assessments is rooted in a variation of the argument-based approaches, which can begin with an interpretive argument and then be supported by collecting evidence and presented as a validity argument following logical inferencing. While there are various versions of validity arguments, Green only presents one example, Bachman and Palmer’s (2010) assessment use argument, leaving out, for example, Chapelle, Enright, and Jamieson’s (2008) influential validity argument for the *Test of English as a Foreign Language* (TOEFL®). The chapter then concludes with thoughts on beneficial consequences, including washback and feedback, all of which are included in current versions of interpretive arguments.

Part II, chapters five and six, is a survey of techniques used in assessing Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) of language use. Green considers grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation integral to receptive and productive language use. Both chapters are based on the socio-cognitive theoretical approach outlined by the author’s Ph.D. advisor, Cyril Weir (2005). Green identifies three steps to collecting evidence of reading and listening abilities: defining KSAs, selecting appropriate input, and developing appropriate tasks.

Chapter 5 centers on designing and scoring receptive language use tasks in reading and listening. The chapter begins with a discussion of types of reading and cognitive processes involved in reading. Subsequently, types of listening and listening processes are discussed. Both reading and listening skills are framed in a model of comprehension processes developed by Weir (2005) and Field (2008). The chapter continues with a description of the development of a receptive test from specifications development through task design and trialing procedures and concludes with a thoughtful discussion of scoring, reporting, and standard setting.

Chapter 6 covers the designing and scoring of productive and interactive language-related tasks for speaking and writing. Green draws a parallel between assessing receptive and productive language. For instance, both sets of skills are based on a model of language processing. Similar to the model for receptive language processing, a simplified model of language production is presented. Green makes a distinction, however, between productive and interactive language use. This distinction is relevant for the purpose and design of spoken language assessments. For example, production is a monologic event often preceded by planning time, whereas an interactive task involves more than one speaker. During spoken interaction, the interlocutors, rather than a test designer, determine the input. This situation may result in different experiences for each test taker depending on language level, personality, and other characteristics of the language partner. Green then discusses issues unique to assessing productive skills: task development, impression scoring, error counts, checklists, and types of rating scales. The chapter continues with practical aspects, including developing rating scales, rater training, and the use of technology in assessing language. The chapter concludes with a discussion of score reporting and standard setting.

Part III begins with Chapter 7, which introduces broader issues in language assessment embedded in a historical survey of phases in the evolution of language assessment that mirror

teaching approaches and current educational perspectives. The chapter begins with the first publication on language assessment, *Language Testing* (Lado, 1961) and the first course on language testing at the University of Edinburgh and proceeds to the current version of the TOEFL test and issues that influenced its development. This chapter is invaluable to both the novice reader and assessment practitioner as a reminder of how far the field of language testing has come in over fifty years. The final two developmental phases introduced by the author, formative assessment and assessment for learning, reflect current discussion and debate in language assessment. These current topics, assessment *for* learning versus assessment *of* learning and dynamic assessment, were featured presentations under the title *Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA)* at the 2014 Roundtable on Second Language Studies hosted by Teachers College, Columbia University.

The final section of Chapter 7 explores three future directions and perspectives on language assessment, including the role of assessment in language classrooms, ethical and critical language assessment, and technology for language assessment. In a section appropriately titled “Assessment Wars,” Green describes the issues teachers face when selecting or developing language assessments and the role the assessments play in curricular decisions and lesson plans. For example, classroom-based assessments are used in the classroom but students are tested using high-stakes standardized tests. The next section uncovers issues of bias, fairness, political values, and assumptions behind assessment practices, which are so often overlooked. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of how technology is assisting with various aspects of language assessment.

Language professionals, seasoned and new, will find the material in this book comprehensive, albeit within the constraints of a page limit. Each chapter contains scaffolding questions and tasks for students to reflect on personal experiences and share opinions. Chapter 8 concludes Part III with commentaries on selected tasks from each chapter, a glossary of key terms, and a section on further reading organized by category. To facilitate learning, key terms are presented in bold throughout the book. Routledge has also included a website for each book in the series with additional resources to accompany the text. The resources for this book include illustrative assessment cycles, relevant external web links, statistical tools, and task types. Although their content may be relevant and beneficial for further exploration of concepts presented in the book, these resources are only available as downloadable, static PDFs. These pages, in their current format, could have been included as an additional chapter or appendices in the book instead of being provided as downloads from a website. It would have been refreshing to see more dynamic or interactive electronic resources that are better delivered via technology. Furthermore, surprisingly underrepresented in this volume are current technological issues and resources that may be available for classroom-based language assessment. For example, using assessment modules in content management systems such as Blackboard and Moodle, textbook companion sites, authoring tools, and use of mobile devices for formative assessment should be relevant to a practicing language instructor. Due to the increase in teaching and assessment through blended-learning and online courses, technology-enabled language assessment is more likely the new norm rather than just an emerging trend.

Despite these minor limitations, *Exploring Language Assessment and Testing* introduces students and teachers to the topics of educational assessment and assessment literacy without

coming across as too technical. It is written following sound pedagogical principles, presenting an overview of relevant topics and issues in the field. These include practical advice and theoretical issues fundamental to language assessment and testing. Those familiar with this material might agree that Green's new book is an integral addition to the growing list of introductory texts on language testing and assessment that would appeal to language testers and students during their study of language education.

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