

**Anthony Green. *Exploring Language Assessment and Testing: Language in Action***  
**New York: Routledge. 2014. Pp. 272.**

Language testing and assessment is a discipline within the broader field of applied linguistics where much has already been written on the subject. In his article 'Textbook Trends in Language Testing,' Alan Davies (2008) highlighted the abundance of publications on this topic. The recent guidebook, *The Routledge Handbook of Language Testing* (Fulcher & Davidson eds., 2012) also surveyed the area comprehensively. The question could then be asked as to what could another general guide to the discipline hope to achieve? This sister publication, from the *Routledge Introductions to Applied Linguistics, Language in Action* series, is another introductory guide that has, however, foregrounded practical concerns. Many research-oriented guidebooks to language testing have placed emphasis on theory over practice. The author here, though, has decided on a 'back-to-front' organization by initially focussing on practice and then moving on to related theory. This is its main differentiating feature from other introductory guides to language assessment. The author has also given particular emphasis to practising ESL/ELT teachers and Masters students in Applied Linguistics or Language Education.

The discipline of language assessment is one, like many, that for the novice can be bewildering at first. However, the author, in this guide, introduces often-complex professional issues and concepts in a user-friendly way. Also, the myriad technical terms and definitions used in language testing are explained in an easy to understand style. Examples include simple figures and diagrams such as one using a metaphor of an ancient water clock to explain 'feedback' (p. 90). The book's applied approach contains helpful and easy to distinguish boxed items setting out related practical tasks. It furthermore encourages practicing teachers to consider their own time in the classroom through personal reflections in more boxed sections. This procedure works well in connecting and involving teachers in the thinking behind language testing and promoting their input. In addition, the book's practical discussion moves further than initial issues of test item implementation to questions of why particular items should or shouldn't be included in a language test. Also, the divide in testing arenas and the conflict of paradigms in the field of language assessment is highlighted in the section 'Assessment wars: teacher assessment vs. external tests'. This points out how language assessment practices can sometimes have an 'us and them' approach for working teachers and assessment designers/specialists.

The book is separated into three sections and its practicing teacher focus is demonstrated in how the content is arranged. Section I deals with the central issues related to the purposes and practices of language assessment. This especially

emphasizes how much effort is required to produce an individual language test. It then goes on to outline four essential qualities of 'useful' assessments in this order: practicality, reliability, validity and beneficial consequences. The recent *Routledge Handbook of Language Testing* (Fulcher & Davidson eds., 2012) oriented its content organisation to validity concerns as front and centre. However, as the author has given this guide a teacher focus as key, the importance bestowed to test practicality is understandable. The author stresses that "an impractical assessment will not survive for very long whatever its other distinctions" (p. 59).

Section II investigates the theories and methods used in assessing the receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive and interactive skills (speaking and writing). Significant concepts and instruments like task design, scoring and rating scales are pointed out. Language testing is also positioned in a socio-cognitive framework where the author highlights the importance of test tasks being relevant to real-world language use. This is linked to handy practical examples and reader guided tasks from real language tests such as *Cambridge English Language Assessment (PET)* and *Versant Aviation English Test*. Each section for receptive and productive skills concludes with a useful discussion on standard setting.

Section III covers the historical, theoretical and conceptual progressions in ESL/ELT testing for the last five decades. As the author's organizational intent shows, this part is the most theory-heavy section of the book. The continuing issues that are confronted by both ESL/ELT teachers and assessment experts are incorporated in this section. These include the necessity to tackle ethical concerns such as test fairness in every facet of testing. Also mentioned is the need to achieve comprehensive methods for utilizing diverse models of language and language proficiency such as assessment of English language varieties and cross-modal literacy. This focus on World Englishes was lacking from the recent *Routledge Handbook of Language Testing* (Fulcher & Davidson eds., 2012) and is good to see included in this book. Once more, the discussion's posing of self-reflected questioning and practical scaffolding means the reader can easily relate it to their own teaching and/or study. The author describes historical changes in tests from ones that focused on vocabulary and grammar to test tasks that were more aware of their social context through communication-oriented assessment. This is highlighted with examples from some widely used language assessments. A final word on future directions points to the increasing use of technology in test administration and implementation and the continued growth of international language assessments around the world.

The author acknowledges that technical terms and terminology have sometimes been used inconsistently and confusingly in the language-testing field. There is a brief glossary section that covers the terms used in the book, but perhaps further explanation as to why the definitions differ so much could have been further

illuminated. There are also some suggestions for supplementary reading which would no doubt be very useful for introductory readers, yet why Routledge's own recent 2012 edition of their *Handbook of Language Testing* has been omitted is a mystery.

This book is a first-rate introduction to language testing and assessment for postgraduate students and working ESL/ELT teachers. The extensive use of practical examples to highlight key theories and ideas has been done in a user-friendly and easy to follow manner. The focus on practice first over theory is the book's key differentiating feature from other general introductory books to language assessment and testing. This means it is a worthwhile starting place for practicing teachers and interested students. The opportunities for self-reflection on individual experience and application to related theory are ones that could lead to valuable additional discussion.

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## References

- Davies, A. (2008). Textbook trends in teaching language testing. *Language Testing*, 25(3), 327-347.
- Fulcher, G., & Davidson, F. (Eds. ) (2012). *The Routledge handbook of language testing*. Routledge.