

Assessment for language teaching

Aek, Phakiti and Constant, Leung

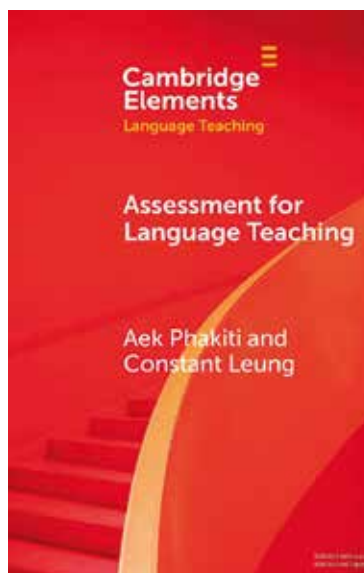
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Language testing and assessment (LTA) is a critical element of English language teaching (ELT) and teacher professionalism (Gambell, 2004; Shohamy, 2020). Effective second/foreign language (L2) teachers are also effective assessors. This signifies the tight connection and confluence of LTA and ELT, as approved in previous studies (Bachman & Adrian, 2022; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2004). Over the past decades, a resounding emphasis has been placed on L2 teachers' assessment literacy (AL) and language assessment literacy (LAL) (Fulcher, 2012; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020). Without such literacies, it would not be possible to ensure the efficacy of one's instruction and the incidence of students' learning over a semester. Although there are some studies and publications on L2 teachers' assessment practices and literacies, a cohesive resource on the key concepts and operational assessment practices is missing in ELT. Spurred to address this gap, Phakiti and Leung composed an influential book on "assessment for language teaching" in a series entitled "Elements in Language Teaching". The book is a timely effort to move from L2 assessment theories and terminologies to actual and real-life practices in the classroom. It integrates different perspectives on common assessment approaches and methods in ELT by referring to their merits and demerits. Therefore, the book is highly recommended to English teachers, teacher educators, and researchers, who can develop a theoretically and practically informed understanding of LAL and its implementation.

Compared to other relevant books on LTA in L2 education contexts, the present resource persuasively explains the key concepts, beliefs, and practices underpinning assessment approaches using a variety of educational, socio-cultural, and ethical lenses. It goes beyond previously developed theories and models, proposing new assessment designs and ways of development. Another unique feature of this book is the allocation of specific boxes with direct links in which pertinent files and resources would be accessible to the readers. The use of smooth and simple language devoid of complicated LTA jargon is also eye-catching in the book. This monograph has a specific focus on easy-to-apply assessment practices, which can be injected to different language teaching programs.



In terms of content, this book comprises eight chapters. In the first chapter, the authors introduce the whole book and key concepts of assessment. They also describe the features and target readers of the book and give a snapshot of all the chapters. The constructs of LAL, formative assessment, summative assessment, and different stakeholders are operationally defined in this opening chapter. To encourage the readers to employ the propositions put in this book in other contexts, the authors in this chapter explain assessment in content–language integrated learning (CLIL) and English medium instruction (EMI) contexts. In the second chapter, a background description is provided for some key terms like ‘assessment’, ‘testing’, and ‘measurement’ suggesting assessment as a superordinate term. Standardized tests and their involving stakeholders are also described in this section. Additionally, different test functions and purposes of assessment are discussed by the authors in a laconic way. Returning to the background of assessment, chapter three convincingly explicates the interconnections among five technical terms, namely ‘testing’, ‘measurement’, ‘assessment’, ‘evaluation’, and ‘utilization’. Using graphic representations, the authors elaborate on these concepts and their overlaps. The second part of this chapter deals with theoretical models and frameworks of language proficiency in LTA. It provides a summary Bachman and Palmer’s (2010) language proficiency model. Such a multi-componential view has significantly shaped L2 practitioners’ assessment approaches to language proficiency. The components of language proficiency and different language skills are also explained in this chapter. Finally, the authors end this section with an explanation of language proficiency in light of social dimensions and multilingualism.

In chapter four, the authors explain the similarities, differences, and interrelationships between formative assessment and summative assessment without explicitly polarizing them. A nested approach is suggested to view both assessments. The purpose of formative assessment is considered to be informing and improving teaching and learning, while summative assessment is claimed to make a judgment of final outcome/learning according to pre-specified benchmarks. The comparison of these types of assessment is further expanded to ‘assessment of learning’, ‘assessment for learning’. The former relates to summative assessment, but the latter reflects formative assessment approaches. In this chapter, the authors also describe two approaches to decision-making in L2 education called norm-referenced approach and criterion-referenced approach. Afterward, the authors elaborate on some methodical concepts that language assessment professionals use in designing tests and assessments in chapter five. After conceptualizing what a construct means, Phakiti and Leung describe three common approaches to eliciting language performance, including direct, semi-direct, and indirect approaches. The advantages and disadvantages of each approach are also mentioned in this section. However, the authors call for an integrated approach to eliciting L2 students’ language performance. Real examples are provided to support each claim in this chapter, which is really effective for practitioners. Focusing on psychometric theories of LTA, the authors also explain how Classical Test Theory (CTT) views ability, error, and reliability compared to Item Response Theory (IRT) and Generalizability Theory (G-theory). However, this chapter only deals with CTT and its limitations, with the other two theories unexplained.

Chapter six, the lengthiest section of the book, presents different stages of designing a test for summative purposes. Teachers are advised to follow an iterative roadmap including ‘planning’, ‘developing’, ‘administrating’, and ‘using assessment results’ when developing

language learning test tasks. Each stage is thoroughly explained, and practical techniques are listed to carry them out. Moreover, the authors give a full-description of practices to devise selected-response and constructed-response items in their test design. This chapter also shifts toward alternative approaches to L2 assessment by discussing four approaches, namely dynamic assessment, learning-oriented assessment, usage-based assessment, and scenario-based assessment. Each approach is briefly explained to the readers, while they deserve detailed accounts. The use of test design approaches and alternative assessments in non-test domains is also elaborated on in this chapter. Assessment rubrics, portfolio assessment, and task-based assessment are the final concepts explained, as non-test use of what the authors put in this section. The qualities of a good assessment are discussed in chapter seven, where validity, reliability, practicality, ethics, fairness, and impact are described briefly. The way each criterion informs quality assessment is also explained by the authors. In the last chapter, the authors discuss the implications of the book for researching and practicing classroom assessment in ELT. Suggestions for teachers' professional development are also presented. Pedagogically, the authors invite the readers to align assessment and teaching, implement formative assessment wisely, and consolidate classroom-based assessment practices in light of context. Directions for running future research on LTA in relation to multilingualism, ethics, social dimensions, and technologies are also provided in this chapter. Finally, the authors highlight the importance of LAL in teachers' professionalism, hence inviting the readers to join assessment-related events and international associations.

In sum, it is noteworthy that a couple of advantages and strengths in this book deserve to be mentioned. Firstly, the book has used 'reflection' and 'call-out' boxes in each chapter, which are innovative and engaging to the readers, who can simply scan them through QR codes. This feature has made the book multimodal. Secondly, all the chapters revolve around assessment techniques and practices as the core theme of the book. In other words, the book is a unified whole rather than a collection of separated themes. The use of many examples and directions to use assessment practices is another benefit of this resource for the readers. Fourthly, the authors have described each assessment technique using theory-informed and up-to-date explanations for their affordances and limitations in language teaching. The use of real-life test specifications in the appendix and a simple glossary of LTA terms is the fifth merit of this book. However, it is unfortunate that this book has presented a wide range of assessment concepts and approaches in very short chapters, while each could have been allocated longer sections. Most of the chapters are less than 20 pages and descriptions of key concepts are insufficient. Another drawback is that the book has provided chapters consecutively without page breaks. In many cases, a chapter is started right after the last paragraph of the previous chapter as if it is a continuation of that paragraph. Hence, it would have been a better idea to separate the chapters more professionally. The authors have bombarded the readers with an ocean of assessment-related concepts, models, approaches, and theories in only 112 pages, which is surprising. This may cause the readers to consider the book to be written quickly and unsystematically. The book is also limited in the use of research evidence in support of assessment practices. It would have been better to add directions for future research at the end of each chapter. The final shortcoming of this book is that only the last chapter includes a concluding part, which is again too short with three lines. The provision of cohesive conclusions for each section was expected from the authors.

Overall, this book is a meritorious resource for English language teachers, teacher educators, and researchers, who can grasp a quick understanding of key concepts, theories, and practices of L2 assessment in a short book. The sample assessment practices reported in the book can provide insights for novice L2 teachers and assessors. Teacher educators can teach this handy book in assessment-related training courses for pre-service and in-service English language teachers in different contexts. Finally, L2 researchers interested in LTA can obtain fresh ideas for doing research on different assessment concepts and practices, especially alternative ones in conjunction with technologies.

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