U. Knoch & S. Macqueen. *Assessing English for Professional Purposes*. Routledge. 2020. Pp. 211.

Some of us will find it hard to believe that twenty years have passed since Dan Douglas (2000) published his foundational book on specific-purpose language testing. Clearly, as readers of this award-winning[i] book will discover, a lot has happened since then.

As is characteristic of all the two authors' work, this volume is both rigorous and original, setting out the status quo ante while introducing fresh theoretical perspectives and pushing the boundaries of language assessments for professional purposes (LAPP) in new directions.

They begin by proposing an expanded definition of LAPPs to include not just formal language tests, but also consequential, non-test, language evaluations, where the assessment is made by a 'professional insider' (or 'layperson') rather than a language expert (Chapter 1, Scope). LAPP is:

<u>any assessment process</u>, carried out by and for invested parties, which is used to determine a person's ability to understand and/or use the language of a professionally-oriented domain to a specified or necessary level. p. 3 [emphasis added]

Two publicly-documented assessment events, involving an overseas-trained vet and a reluctant English as an additional language (EAL) juror respectively, are used to demonstrate the distinction between a formal testing procedure and a layperson's evaluation. In the first example, an Irish vet whose first language is English gained national media attention after failing a test used to assess whether her language proficiency was sufficient to practise as a health professional in Australia. In the second example, a judge conducted an evaluation of whether the juror's language proficiency was sufficient for him to follow court proceedings and participate in jury room deliberations.

These examples also serve as a platform for introducing the central themes of the book. Firstly, drawing on Giddens, (1990, 1999) and others, LAPPs are framed as a means of managing language-associated risk. This includes both the risk of a candidate being misclassified, as in the case of the vet, and the risk of consequential miscommunications in professional settings, as in the case of the juror. However, the desire to reduce risk needs to be balanced against the responsibilities of the respective stakeholders. These responsibilities, the authors argue, extend beyond attention to test consequences on the part of test providers and the need for honesty on the part of test candidates to include the requirement that LAPPs should maximise any potential benefits for the candidate as well as for their future workplace. The argument,

elaborated in Chapter 6 (Policy), is that LAPPs should be designed to influence candidates' test preparation activities in such a way as to improve their subsequent language performance, thus benefitting the candidate and the destination workplace alike.

The nature of the test used to assess the overseas-trained vet highlights a third theme, namely the implications of emerging technologies such as voice recognition and language analysis software for the interpretation of LAPP scores. In Chapter 5 (Validation), the authors present a detailed argument for how these technologies *"introduce an extra layer of modelling making the test-taker's performance less direct"* (p. 19), hence making greater demands in terms of evidence to support the validation argument.

In Chapter 2 (Construct), the authors tease out the different dimensions of the assessment construct for LAPPs. They distinguish between the theoretical construct (the underlying ability that the test purports to measure), the operationalised construct (what is actually captured in the moment of assessment), the stated (publicly communicated) construct and the perceived construct (public perceptions of a test's nature and purpose) and point to the interactions between these different dimensions. In addition to addressing the perennial debate regarding the boundaries between language ability and professional knowledge, Chapter 2 considers the (in)separability of language ability and context in assessment. Specifically, the authors argue for a socially-oriented theory of construct, identifying and exemplifying the inevitable influence on test design, delivery and performance of three layers of context: the dominant set of social values which generates the test mandate, the assessment 'infrastructure' (or assessment method), as well as the circumstances surrounding the moment of assessment ('simulation context').

In addition to the assessment design staples (e.g., test specifications, scoring, trialling and standard setting), the book introduces a veritable bounty of models and frameworks likely to sustain assessment researchers and test designers for a good while to come. The first of these, the LAPP Codes of Relevance, provides a model for sampling linguistic repertoires of professional workplaces, ranging from intra-professional registers to societal varieties (Chapter 2, Construct). Other offerings include an expanded model for conducting needs analyses (Chapter 3, Needs), a representative list of tasks for a LAPP test blueprint (Chapter 4, Development), and a truly comprehensive framework for validating the score interpretations and uses of LAPPs (Chapter 5, Validation). In Chapter 6 (Policy), we are presented firstly, with the 'Hierarchy of affordances of test use' for calculating the risks and benefits of LAPPs to guide advocacy and secondly, with a language assessment policy evaluation framework designed to test the warrants, assumptions and sources of backing for a given use case with the aim of promoting *"a more meaningful, positive impact"*.

It is no accident that Tim McNamara's (1990) doctoral research, which informed the development of the Occupational English Test (OET), was used as the worked example for conducting a needs analysis (Chapter 5). Indeed, much of the research and examples cited in the book reflect the authors' close involvement with the OET during their time at the Language Testing Research Centre (LTRC), where the first author Ute Knoch is currently Director. The LTRC has a strong tradition of research and publication in LSP and LAPP going back to the early 1990's. In addition to the assessment of overseas health professionals, this includes a substantial body of research and development of specific-purpose language assessment of teachers, particularly language teachers, although this was not specifically touched on in the book.

The ideas, concepts and frameworks presented in this book are highly relevant to anyone with an interest in assessment research, development, or policy in general, and LAPP in particular. While themes and examples are skilfully layered and recycled throughout, they are revisited with sufficient frequency, and in sufficient detail, for individual chapters to stand in their own right, which is no mean feat. Dense and at times complex information is communicated in a clear and accessible manner with some tactfully-worded critiques such as *"loss of a potential market share might cause test providers not to refute an inappropriate proposed use"* (p. 44).

The book concludes by setting out a detailed research agenda and, with no fewer than thirteen areas identified, it seems there is still much work to be done. So, in the authors' own words: *"Let us rise to this challenge"*.

Reviewed by Kathryn Hill
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References

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McNamara, T (1990). *Assessing the second language proficiency of health professionals.* University of Melbourne.

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[i] This monograph received ILTA's Best Book on Language Testing award in 2020.