

Language Assessment Matters Issue 4

November 2015

The Newsletter of the Association for Language Testing and Assessment of Australia and New Zealand



In this issue we have reports from the 2nd Asian Association for Language Assessment Conference, held in Bangkok in early May, and the ALTAANZ/LTRC workshops in language assessment, held in Melbourne in September. There is an introduction to Professor Constant Leung (pictured left), the ALTAANZ supported plenary speaker at the ALAA/ALANZ/ALTAANZ conference in Adelaide this November. We also have a summary of the results of the ALTAANZ Member Survey. As always, please do let us know if you would like to contribute an item to the newsletter.

Upcoming PLTA Issue.... Available online November 2015

CONTENTS Volume 4, Issue 2, 2015:

ARTICLES

- Authentic interaction and examiner accommodation in the IELTS speaking test: A discussion. Anna Filipi, Monash University
- Development of a Spanish generic writing skills scale for the Colombian Graduate Skills Assessment (SaberPro). Ana Maria Ducasse, RMIT University, La Trobe University & Kathryn Hill, La Trobe University
- Using corpus complexity analysis to refine a holistic ESL writing placement rubric. Jeremy Ray Gevara, Pennsylvania State University

RESEARCH DIGESTS

- Towards improved language assessment of written health professional communication: the case of the Occupational English Test. Ute Knoch, Tim McNamara, Robyn Woodward-Kron, Cathie Elder, Elizabeth Manias, Eleanor Flynn, Ying Zhang

BOOK REVIEWS

- Exploring language assessment and testing: Language in action. A. Green. Reviewed by Simon Davidson, University of Melbourne
- Interaction in Paired Oral Proficiency Assessment in Spanish. A.M. Ducasse. Reviewed by Chihiro Inoue, University of Bedfordshire.

The 2nd Asian Association for Language Assessment (AALA) Conference 2015



AALA is a new association for language assessment in Asia with a mission to promote language assessment activities in the region. The 2nd AALA Conference and Workshops were held at Chulalongkorn University and Hotel Mercure, Bangkok, Thailand between April 30 and May 2, 2015. The theme of the conference and workshop was *“Assessing English Language Ability: Issues and Trends”*. Two workshops were given at Chulalongkorn University prior to the two-day conference by Talia Isaacs (University of Bristol) on *“Principles and practice in assessing speaking: Beyond reticence to target “ear and tongue skills”* and by Aek Phakiti (University of Sydney) on *“A practical approach to questionnaire construction and analysis for language assessment research”*. Both workshops were well-attended with enthusiastic language teachers and researchers in language assessment.

The conference was held for two days at Hotel Mercure, Bangkok. This conference was packed with uncountable interesting and significant research presentations and discussion by research across Asian regions including China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea and Thailand. To highlight, the presentation sessions included a plenary presentation by Bernard Spolsky (Bar-Ilan University) on *“Some concerns about language testing”* which provided very insightful discussion on historical changes, challenges and concerns about fair language testing and assessment. There were four invited presentations by David Quin (Hong Kong Polytechnic University) on *“Putting academic vocabulary lists to the test: Measuring the academicity of different generations of the TOEFL”*, Aek Phakiti (University of Sydney) on *“Test takers’ calibration and strategy use in IELTS listening tasks”*, Talia Isaacs (University of Bristol) on *“Perceptions and ratings of lay listeners, teachers, and examiners in L2 pronunciation scale development and validation”*, and Yong-Won Lee (Seoul National University) on *“Reconsidering consequential validity in diagnostic language assessment”*. There were 13 individual papers, a poster presentation on various topics (total 15 research posters) and two professional sessions. This conference did not have a parallel presentation session, so everyone had a chance to attend all sessions. The atmosphere was very friendly and supportive of new language testing and assessment researchers. There were two other highlights worth noting. The first was the awesome conference host – the English as an International Language Program at Chulalongkorn University – whose staff was very hospitable, friendly and helpful. The second highlight was the great coffee breaks and lunches. All participants had lunch in a 4.5 star hotel restaurant with a wide range of food selections (Western, Chinese, Japanese, Indian or Thai) from starters to the main course, desserts and a variety of drinks.

All in all, this conference was a great success in terms of the conference themes, quality of papers and presentations, and atmosphere. AALA will be holding its third conference in Sanur, Bali from the 19th to 21st of May 2016. You can find more information about AALA and its future conferences and workshops by visiting <http://www.aalawebsite.com/#>.

LTRC / ALTAANZ Workshops, Melbourne, September 2015

Kristina Galloway, an experienced secondary foreign language teacher attended all of the workshops. She reports on them below...

I thoroughly enjoyed this opportunity to explore the fascinating world of assessment in more depth than is usually possible in the life of a busy teacher. Everything about teaching and learning languages is complicated, and testing them is no exception. It is reassuring to know the amount of care and thought that goes in to creating test constructs and daunting to reflect on how difficult it is for teachers to write their own truly valid and reliable tests.

Ute Knoch's workshop "Integrating Peer- and Self-assessment" gave us an overview of research findings in this area. While peer- and self-assessment have become almost ubiquitous in Australian schools, there are cultural differences in students' receptiveness to the ideas. Ute stressed the importance of training students in how to peer- and self-assess. She also discussed the widespread use of rubrics as scaffolded tools to enhance the efficacy and efficiency, giving us a number of samples to analyse and use as models. She noted that another value of peer- and self-assessment is in raising students' awareness of the criteria that are being used to judge their work and removing some of the mystery that students can feel about assessment.

In her workshop on "Assessing Vocabulary" Susy Macqueen gave us an opportunity to explore what "knowing" vocabulary really means and different approaches to assessing vocabulary learning. She gave us some useful tools and strategies for use in teaching and designing our own tests, as well as prompting us to consider the washback effects of large external tests and sets of prescribed outcomes.

Neomy Storch discussed research findings on the differences between genuinely collaborative and co-operative writing activities in her session "Implementing and Assessing Collaborative Writing". We were alerted to some of the potential pitfalls involved in assuming that on-line tools foster genuine collaboration. She offered plenty of practical advice on how to make the most of collaborative arrangements in our classrooms and some tips on how to go about assessing the product of collaborative work.

The final presentation by Xiaoming Xi from the Educational Testing Service, gave an overview into how test makers define the constructs they are testing and the relationships between test performance and real life contexts. Although promoted as a workshop, it was in fact more of a lecture, in a venue designed more for lecturing. For test makers and researchers, the session raised interesting questions about the major strands of research that inform test making practices, and offered insights into the strengths and weaknesses of each and possible synergies between them, as well as alerting participants to areas where further research is needed. For teachers, it was fascinating to see the dedication and thoughtfulness that goes into the creation of the high stakes tests that govern so many of our lives!

Introducing Professor Constant Leung; our keynote speaker in Adelaide

In announcing Professor Constant Leung (Centre for Language, Discourse and Communication, King's College London), as the ALTAANZ-sponsored keynote speaker at the ALAA/ALANZ/ALTAANZ conference to be held in Adelaide 30 November – 2 December 2015. Angela Scarino asked him two questions and his responses are below.

What do you see as the crucial issues now and going into the future in the assessment of English/language in educational settings?

I think we are beginning to fully grasp the significance of the de-centering of English in different parts of the world for teaching and assessment. By this I mean the tacit and monopolistic support for the 'Anglo native speaker competence' model (itself a partial representation based on a selection of linguistic, class and cultural characterizations) is giving way to a looser conceptualization that would regard diversity and difference in language practice(s) as unexceptional. Some strands within sociolinguistics have, for course, long recognised 'situatedness' as a key influence in the ways in which people use language to make meaning. The recent research in areas such as ELF and translanguaging have added to the momentum towards understanding, accepting and working with diversity and difference. Non-conformity to the putative Anglo-centric native speaker language practice can no longer be dismissed as 'foreignness' not worthy of consideration. For language assessment, a key consequence of this is that the hitherto thing-like certainty in terms of standards, norms and correctness (perhaps less so than the first two) cannot be applied universally. Norms (in the plural) will have to be differentiated for context, time/duration and purpose and so on. This in turn raises fundamental questions regarding the ways we have been operationalizing concepts such as 'construct', 'validity' and 'reliability' in language assessment. The diversity and fluidity in language practices that we now see as unexceptional, however, have not obviated the need to work with these concepts. My view is that we need to take 'situatedness' as an empirical issue on a case-by-case basis, and avoid excessive typification and reification when we try to give accounts of language use in terms of appropriateness, correctness and norms. For instance, 'academic writing' should not be regarded a universal phenomenon that is the same in all English-speaking universities in the world. We need to take account of what actually happens on the ground locally in different disciplines and institutions, as the researchers in Academic Literacies have suggested. There will be an issue of how 'local' is 'local'. That's part of the task we will have to deal with in the next period.

What is the connecting theme of your own research endeavour? In other words what is the overall program of research that you have undertaken? Where is your own research heading? Why does this research matter?

I have come to recognise that my research efforts have been primarily related to my educational concerns, particularly in terms how grand theories and policy dispositions impact on teachers and students, with particular reference to English as an additional language. So, for example, my work in teacher assessment and classroom pedagogy are directly linked to the complex relationship between theory (however defined) and practice. Another way of saying this is: how do curriculum regimes influence what goes on in the classroom?

In the next period I would like to focus on two issues. Drawing on the work in Academic Literacies, College Composition/EAP and language assessment I would like to develop a better understanding of idea of academic language competence in English, perhaps I should say competences. There is plenty of published research to provide a good starting point. There may well be a need for further empirical work at a later stage. The other issue is concerned with the relationship between curriculum content and language, and how we may integrate the two in additional language pedagogy in public non-selective schooling education. The earlier work by Crandall, Snow, Mohan and others provide a good backdrop, the current CLIL 'movement' in Europe and elsewhere is also beginning to produce some interesting and relevant research. Again more empirical investigations may be needed. The motivation for focussing on these issues is the accelerating linguistic and cultural-cum-social class diversity in the student populations in many parts of the world. A better of understanding of these issues will contribute to our ability to respond to the educational needs of some of the students from diverse backgrounds.

We look forward to hearing more from Professor Leung at the conference.

Summary ALTAANZ survey 2015

In 2015, the ALTAANZ committee initiated a survey to collect information about ALTAANZ members' viewpoints in regard to priorities for the Association. This was to ensure limited funds available are used in best possible way and to ascertain whether our communication strategy is effective. At the time of the survey there were 320 ALTAANZ members (now the membership has increased to 350). The following is a summary of what we found based on 81 respondents (25%) that we would like to share.

1. Information about the respondents

- *Country of residence:* Australia (N = 48); New Zealand (N =10); Japan (N = 2); Vietnam (N = 2); USA (N = 2); Others (Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Oman, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, UK; N =1 each). 8 respondents did not answer this question.
- *Work setting:* University/tertiary institution (76.0%); Government agency (10.1%); Not for profit organization (7.6%); Primary/secondary school (6.3%); Adult education (6.3%); For profit or ganisation (1.3%)
- *Highest educational qualification:* Master's degree (49.4%); Doctoral degree (41.8%); Postgraduate diploma (5.1%); Bachelor's degree (3.8%)
- *Involvement in language assessment/testing:* Test/assessment development (57.0%); Testing/assessment research (49.4%); Training others in language assessment/testing (41.8%); Test scoring/rating (40.5%); Test administration (35.4%); Assessing learners in classroom situations (35.4%); Developing language assessment tasks/tools for classroom use (35.4%); Item or prompt writing (22.8%); Item or prompt writing for high stakes tests/exams (17.7%)
- *Length of ALTAANZ membership:* Over 3 years (32.9%); 13-24 months (27.9%); 6-12 months (15.2%); 25-36 months (15.2%); less than 6 months (8.9%)

2. Prioritizing ALTAANZ initiatives

Members were asked to rank priorities for the association. The rankings are presented in order below:

1. Offering training in language assessment (through workshops, teacher in-service etc)
2. Promoting understanding of assessment practices/diversity of assessment
3. Stimulating research
4. Increasing teacher participation
5. Increasing participation among researchers
6. Promoting the role of assessment in language learning
7. Setting up an advocacy committee (e.g. to address inappropriate testing practices)
8. Increasing student participation

3. Prioritizing ALTAANZ's financial foci

The members were asked to rank the following financial foci in order of priorities. Members' rankings are presented below:

1. Offer language assessment workshops for EAL teachers in different locations
2. Ensure sufficient funds are reserved to cover a future conference running at a loss
3. Offer language assessment workshops for LOTE teachers in different locations
4. Direct funds to support ALTAANZ workshops development funding
5. Offer language assessment workshops for researchers in different locations
6. Create fund for teacher practitioner research
7. Fund ALTAANZ members to prepare submissions (e.g. government enquiries) on current issues of concern
8. Create fund to supplement student research funding (to be applied for via competitive process)
9. Create travel award for teachers to attend the bi-annual ALTAANZ conference
10. Create a Master's and/or Doctoral level thesis award
11. Make a one-off donation to the Penny McKay Award administered by ALAA

4. The most important priorities for ALTAANZ in the next three years

The members were asked to add important priorities not included in the above section for ALTAANZ in the next three years. The main suggested priorities (not in order of importance) include:

- Promote research
- Increase membership
- Offer language assessment training/workshops
- Informing members about conferences
- Encourage trans-Tasman connections
- Develop resources
- Increase quality of journal
- Foster and support practitioner research
- Link assessments to Australian curriculum
- Create Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

5. ALTAANZ workshop topics in language assessment.

Members were also asked to list possible future workshop topics. A summary of the main responses are as follows:

- Quantitative analysis (including equating and vertical scaling by item response theory, Rasch analysis, test analysis)
- Practical language assessment practices for school teachers
- Assessment-for-learning
- Item writing
- Setting cut-scores
- Developing task types
- Task-based assessment
- Portfolio and process writing
- Pragmatics in speaking assessments
- Developing listening assessments
- Diagnostic assessment
- Assessing paraphrase/summary writing

- Developing assessment tasks for content and language integrated learning
- Post-entry language assessment (PELA)
- Dynamic assessment
- Tests for language teachers
- Online assessment

6. Perceived effectiveness of ALTAANZ's communication with members

Members were also asked about how effective the Association's communication strategies are. The responses are listed below.

- Email (Good/excellent = 86%)
- Newsletter (Good/excellent = 81%)
- Facebook (Average = 32%; Good/excellent = 51%)
- Website (Average = 41%; Good/excellent = 53%)
- AGM (Average = 28%; Good/excellent = 67%)

7. Suggestions of how communication can be improved

Many respondents commented on the good communication by ALTAANZ, although a number of suggestions were made as follows:

- Most people like email communication best (and many commented that ALTAANZ is doing this well)
- Some asked for more frequent newsletters
- ALTAANZ website needs updating:
 - Publish conference details earlier
 - Add news section
 - Publish blurbs on articles on research topics
 - Publish lists of upcoming international conferences and future events
- Facebook page could invite short anecdotes from test takers about their test taking experiences
- PLTA was also listed as vehicle. One respondent wrote: 'I think special issues of relevance to different sectors would be a good way to go (e.g., applying assessment frameworks in schools). Such an issue could include commissioned papers from key researchers plus (perhaps) commentaries of a less formal kind for teachers followed by a response?'

8. Other suggestions for ALTAANZ Executive

Many respondents posted positive comments here about the good job the executive is doing. Specific suggestions are as follows:

- Make sure whoever chairs the AGM is competent and well prepared
- Ensure that there is good representation from Australia and new Zealand
- Maybe partnering with state and national TESOL organisations for workshops
- More regular workshops
- Organise webinars with some leading lights from far flung destinations
- Is there a teacher representative on the committee?
- Probably worth offering professional development sessions to university and other ELICOS centres who are willing to pay.

9. Possible actions for committee based on results

ALTAANZ will consider implementing the following actions:

- Offer more teacher workshops
- Try to increase teacher membership
- Secure nest egg of money to ensure conference organisers are secure in case conference returns deficit
- Ensure members are provided with information about events and conferences ahead of time, through a variety of means
- Add section to newsletter with upcoming language assessment conferences/workshops internationally (as well as nationally)
- Review website and possibly add a news feature and publish blurbs of articles, etc.
- Diversify article types invited for PLTA
- Explore possibility of teacher representatives on the ALTAANZ committee

ALTAANZ 2016 THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND 17TH TO 19TH OF NOVEMBER



In the classroom and beyond: Assessing language ability in different contexts.

Confirmed plenary speakers are:

Matt Poehner, Pennsylvania State University
Ute Knoch, University of Melbourne
Peter Keegan, University of Auckland

The Call for Papers will be issued in January with a deadline in April

Student Travel Scholarships Available
Information on www.altanz.org as it comes to hand.



ALTAANZ Management Committee

Election of Office Bearers for 2016

We would like to call for nominations to the positions of Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Communications Officer, and Editor of 'Papers in Language Testing and Assessment' and Student Representative for the ALTAANZ Management Committee. The Student Representative Position is for one year and the other positions are for two years commencing January 2016.

If you would like to nominate for any of these positions or to nominate another ALTAANZ member please complete the attached form and send it to altaanz@gmail.com no later than 5pm AEST on Tuesday 27th November, 2015. Elections for office-bearers will be held at the forthcoming ALTAANZ AGM on Tuesday 1st December in Adelaide at the ALAA/ALANZ/ALTAANZ conference. The AGM will be held at 12.30 (lunch time) in room BH 4-22 of the University of South Australia's City West Campus.

Please contact the current ALTAANZ Secretary, Janet von Randow <janetvonrandow@gmail.com> if you would like further information about any of these positions.

Language Assessment Matters is the newsletter of ALTAANZ, the Association for Language Testing and Assessment of Australia and New Zealand.

Do you have a Language Testing or Assessment related item you would like to have included in the newsletter? If so, please send your submission to altaanz@gmail.com with "newsletter" in the subject line. Possible contributions could include a report on work in progress, a PhD or Master's thesis report, a conference review or report, discussion of a current issue in language testing or assessment, a description of an assessment task which has worked well for your learners or an assessment-related anecdote that you think our membership would find interesting.

