

# Language Assessment Matters

## Issue 9, April 2018

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



PLTA has now been accepted into the Web of Science Emerging Sources Citation Index

Congratulations to our current Editors, Dr Sally O'Hagan and Dr Lynette May, past Editors, and the Editorial Board for this achievement.

### **Papers in Language Testing and Assessment**

New issue (Vol. 7.1) available soon at

<http://www.altanz.org> and <http://arts.unimelb.edu.au/ltrc>

#### **Contents:**

- The gap between communicative ability measurements: general English speaking tests and linguistic laypersons' judgments, Takanori Sato
- Rater variability across examinees and rating criteria in paired speaking assessment, Soo Jung Youn
- Evaluating the relative effectiveness of online and face-to-face training for new writing raters, Ute Knoch, Judith Fairbairn, Carol Myford & Annemiek Huisman
- Book review. Assessment in the language classroom: teachers supporting student learning, Cheng & Fox, reviewed by Lyn May

### ALTAANZ AGM Roundup – New 2018 Office Bearers

The ALTAANZ AGM was held on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2017 in Auckland. The Co-Presidents, the Treasurer, and the PLTA Editors lodged their reports, which were accepted. The election of office bearers resulted in the following appointments.

**Vice President** Susy Macqueen

**Secretary** Morena Magalhaes

**Student Representatives** – Ivy Chen and Diep Tran

**Australian Teacher Representative** – Stephen Walker, the New Zealand Teacher Representative role remains open.

The **PLTA Editors**, Lyn May and Sally O'Hagan, and the **Communications Officer**, Johanna Motteram were re-elected.

The Co-Presidents and the Treasurer will continue their terms until the end of 2018.

### PLTA: Call for submissions

PLTA publishes original research papers, essays/discussion papers on theory, research digests, and reports on work-in-progress. We welcome submissions from new and experienced researchers, including teachers and research students. For further information visit <http://www.altaanz.org>

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](mailto: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.

## Forward Planner: Upcoming Language Assessment Events

(please contact us at [altaanz@gmail.com](mailto:altaanz@gmail.com) to add your event)

### 15<sup>th</sup> EALTA Conference

*Technology-Based Language Assessment: Benefits and Challenges*

25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> May 2018, Bochum, Germany <https://ealta2018.testdaf.de/>

### LTRC 2018, University of Auckland, New Zealand July 2<sup>nd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> 2018

*Selected highlights include:*

#### **ROUNDTABLE: Monday, July 2**

***Connecting language testers and specialists in L2 pedagogy: Issues in classroom-based assessment***

*Conveners: MaryAnn Christison and Adrian Palmer*

#### **WORKSHOPS: Monday, July 2 and Tuesday, July 3**

***A learning-oriented assessment approach in classroom contexts: An expanded conceptualization of performance***, Leaders: James E. Purpura and Carolyn E. Turner

***Mixed methods research in language assessment validation studies***

*Leader: Mehdi Riazi*

***A problem-solving approach to Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling***, Leader: Aek Phakiti

#### **PLENARY SPEAKERS**

***Pamela Moss***, University of Michigan, Samuel J. Messick Memorial Lecture

*Evolving Our Knowledge Infrastructures in Measurement/Recovering Messick's Singerian Approach to Inquiry*

***Joseph Lo Bianco***, University of Melbourne, Alan Davies Lecture

*No Policy without Testing! How the language of policy persuasion and persuasive language helps to make testing count*

### UECA/ALTAANZ/UQ-ICTE Assessment Symposium 14th July 2018

*English Language Assessment in the context of University Language Centres*

<http://ueca.edu.au/assessment2018/> call for papers closes **May 12th 2018**

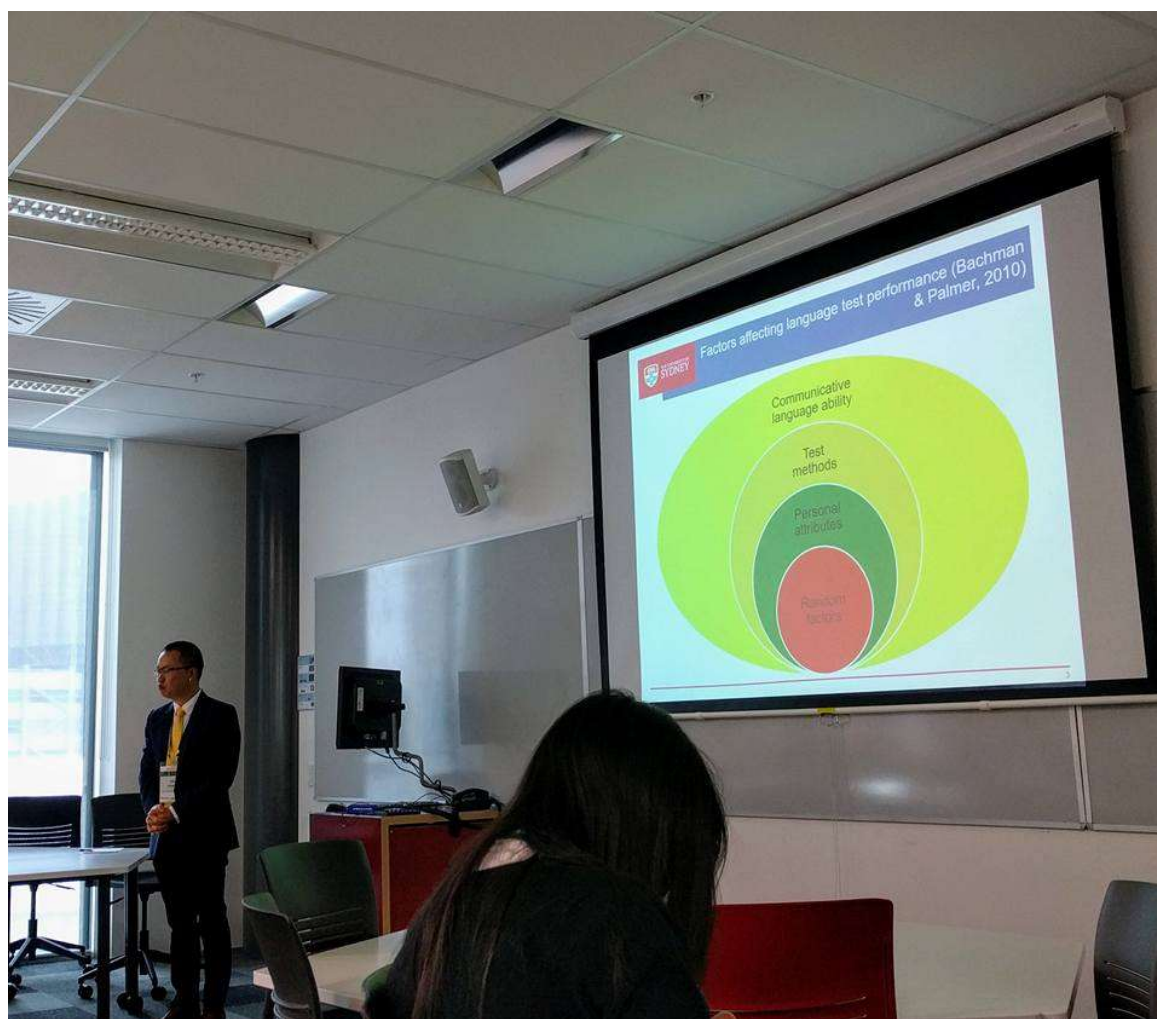
### 5<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference of the Asian Association for Language Assessment (AALA)

*Standards in Language Assessment*

Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, October 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> 2018 <http://aala2018.aconf.org/>

call for papers closes **April 15th 2018**

***Rosemary Erlam reports on the ALTAANZ “Language Assessment Literacy for Teachers” workshop at the combined ALANZ/ALAA/ALTAANZ conference 2017***



Aek Phakiti (pictured above), our now (sadly) retired Vice-President, ran a workshop at our recent combined conference, with collaboration from Angela Scarino who unfortunately was not able to attend. The workshop was aimed at a teacher/practitioner audience.

With such a broad and rather ambitious title, Aek managed to cover a range of topics presenting an overview of some of the choices that teachers have to make in considering appropriate assessment practice for their contexts.

We are grateful to Aek and Angela for their contribution to the key stated purpose of ALTAANZ (<http://www.altaanz.org/>), that is to promote best practice in language assessment in educational and professional setting in [Australia and New Zealand]

**Stop Press:** Aek has generously agreed to run a ‘teacher focused’ workshop at LTRC on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2018, scheduled to attract attendees at the NZALT (New Zealand Association of Language Teachers) conference. It is likely that this workshop will be adapted further for this specific audience.



### **UECA English Language Assessment Symposium, Brisbane, 14 July 2018**

University English Centres of Australia (UECA) in conjunction with The Association for Language Testing and Assessment of Australia and New Zealand (ALTAANZ) and The University of Queensland's English Language Centre (UQ-ICTE) present the inaugural UECA Assessment Symposium 2018.

This full day of professional development focusses on sharing and learning about the development of valid and reliable English language assessment within the context of University Language Centres.

The day will feature an ALTAANZ sponsored workshop delivered by Clare McDowell, whose involvement in language testing spans a 35 year career. Clare brings a wealth of experience in language testing, test design, examiner training and hands-on test management. She has been an item writer for a number of standardised English language tests and has a particular interest in the area of listening skills and how best to assess them. We are sure this workshop will be particularly relevant and useful for all teachers involved in the development of listening assessment and assessment in general.

Further information about the Symposium, including registration and paper/workshop submission, and the full abstract for Clare's workshop "Designing Tasks to assess Listening Skills" can be found at <http://ueca.edu.au/assessment2018/>.





*Diep Tran (left) and Ivy Chen (right) were elected student representatives to the ALTAANZ committee at the AGM in Auckland. They are both PhD Candidates, Diep at the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, and Ivy in the School of Languages and Linguistics at the University of Melbourne. In this article they share a little about their backgrounds, their studies, and their plans for the year to come.*

**Diep:** Hi Ivy, congratulations on your new role as the AU Student Representative for ALTAANZ. It's great to know that you're originally from New Zealand and currently doing a PhD in Australia.

**Ivy:** Thanks, Diep. Yeah, I was born in Taiwan, but grew up in New Zealand. I originally came to Australia for a master's degree (in applied linguistics) and liked it here so much I decided to stay for my PhD.

And Diep, congratulations on your role as the NZ Student Rep. I know you're from Vietnam, but could you tell me a little bit about what you did before this and how you came to study in NZ?

**Diep:** Sure! I started teaching at Hanoi University in 2008. I was a lecturer of Phonetics there until 2011 when I went to New Zealand to study for a Master Degree in TESOL at Victoria University of Wellington. As soon as I completed the degree in 2012, I returned to Vietnam and resumed my teaching job at Hanoi University. Three years later, I decided that it was time to take another big step

forward so I returned to Victoria University to do a PhD in Applied Linguistics. And here I am now, in Wellington and about to start the third year of my PhD journey.

There's a lot more that I'd like to know about you. Could you tell me about the research you are working on and the motivation behind it?

**Ivy:** I'm currently working on creating a validated test of collocational knowledge. I guess growing up bilingual (English and Mandarin), I've always found it fascinating how collocations are ubiquitous and sometimes they're the same across languages, and other times they're different. When people get these collocations 'wrong', they can sound odd, and throw their listeners off. The issue with the current research on collocations is that there is a focus on the teaching and learning of collocations, but very little is known about the testing of collocations. This means that it can be difficult to compare findings when the item selection process is flawed. I am looking at how different properties of collocations (e.g.

frequency, semantic transparency) affect item difficulty. Hopefully future researchers will benefit from the findings, especially in the item selection stage.

**Diep:** Are there any other areas of Linguistics/ Applied Linguistics that you're interested in?

**Ivy:** As I'm an ELICOS teacher, I'm interested in SLA more broadly. Bilingualism is also fascinating, including the notion of translanguaging, which really captures what I do when I 'language'. How about you, Diep? What are you currently working on?

**Diep:** For my current research, I'm validating the Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency. This is a new, high-stakes test, designed to suit Vietnamese learners of English and the context of language use in Vietnam. Given its high-stakes nature, validation research on this test is sorely needed. However, since it was officially used in 2015, no published work on validating the test has been found. That's why I am determined to carry out research that will help to elicit evidence of the test's validity and from there set the direction to improve its quality in the future.

Your research sounds really interesting. It is so true that due attention has not been paid to the testing of collocations. Creating a validated test of collocational knowledge is such a hard job to do. Anyway, I'm sure you've been enjoying it despite all of the troubles. What do you think is the best part of your PhD journey?

**Ivy:** I think what I've enjoyed the most has been interacting with others in the field and sharing different ideas. As I'm quite introverted, I've had to keep this to manageable 'doses' at a time, but it is these moments that are the most

memorable. If I had to choose one event to talk about, I'd have to say it was last year's AAAL in Portland. Not only was it the first time I presented at an international conference, but I was also fortunate enough to be on the conference planning committee. It was such a great experience (and a lot of work); I got to see what happens 'behind the scenes' so to speak.

My question for you, Diep, is about your experiences as an international student. While I'm also technically 'international', I feel like you can probably answer this better than I can. What is one difficulty you faced (or perhaps are still facing) as an international PhD student, and how did (or are) you dealing with it?

**Diep:** My experience as an international student is pretty ... awesome. I have been a part of a very closely-connected community of PhD students at Victoria University and we've always supported each other in both academic and personal issues. I think my biggest challenge as an international student is how to become a truly independent student and take charge of my own work. In my culture, students are supposed to work hard but most would tend to wait or reply on their teachers/supervisors to show them the way to go. And I guess you would agree with me that it is totally different in the NZ and Australia's context where your supervisors would expect you to find your own way. During my first year, there were times when I was very confused, not knowing what to do or which way to go. However, my supervisors were always willing to talk to me and thanks to the discussions with them, I finally could see a direction for my thesis to go into. I overcame my challenge by reading, going to PhD-related workshops, discussing with other PhD students about my and their

research and having frequent meetings with my supervisors. It was tough but it's worthwhile now that I've become a more independent student. Hopefully, my new role as the NZ Student Representative for ALTAANZ will add more variety to my experience as a PhD student and make me a more confident, proactive and independent person.

Speaking of the new role, can you share with me some of your plans for your new role as a Student Representative on the ALTAANZ Committee for 2018?

**Ivy:** In addition to the usual duties, I'd like to try to increase our student members. Like Xiaohua, one of our former ALTAANZ student reps, I'm also on the student committee of the Asian Association for Language Assessment (AALA). I know many of our student members either identify as Asian or do research on Asian languages or with Asian test takers, so I'd like to promote AALA to our student members and vice versa (membership is free!). Also, Xiaohua suggested we try and set up a student meeting at LTRC this year. I'd like to see if that's possible.

Do you have any other ideas or plans, Diep?

**Diep:** I would like to connect with other students in New Zealand who are doing research on or interested in language testing and assessment. I feel lonely here since I'm the only one in the School of Linguistics who works on language testing at the moment. It would be great to form a group with students doing research on language testing from other universities in NZ to share ideas and provide feedback on each other's work. More importantly, I'll provide information about ALTAANZ to this group and encourage them to become members and take part in ALTAANZ's future events. A student meeting at LTRC this year is a great idea. I think, together, we can make it happen.

Thank you very much Ivy for such an interesting interview. I'm so looking forward to meeting you in person in ALTAANZ's upcoming events this year.

**Ivy:** Likewise, Diep. Can't wait to see you (and everyone else) at LTRC!



Morena Magalhaes (left), Stephen Walker (centre) and Susy Macqueen (right) have all recently joined the ALTAANZ Committee.