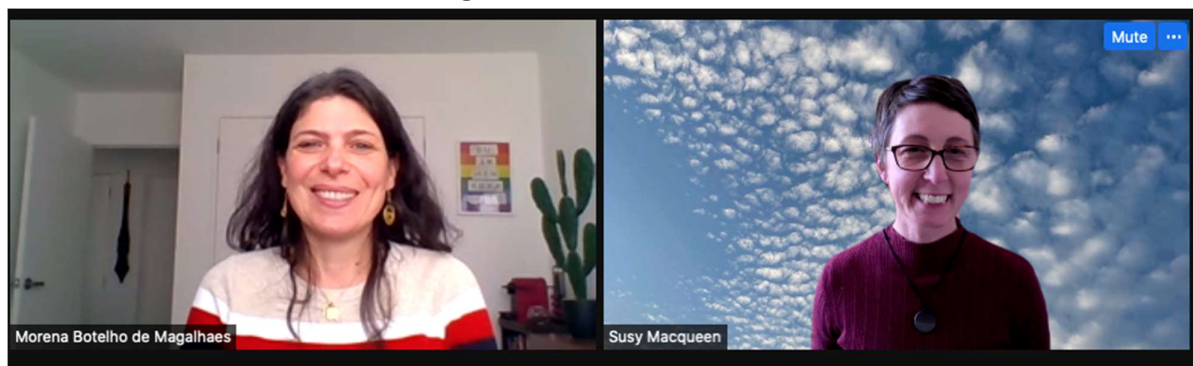


Language Assessment Matters

Issue 15, September 2021

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

Message from Co-Presidents



Greetings ALTAANZ Community,

What a year it has been! Another one navigating adversities, travel restrictions and lots of online activities. Though the overdose of screen time is tiresome, online connections have kept us going and brought more opportunities to get together with colleagues from across the globe.

On that note, we are looking forward to connecting with many of you during our Online Research Forum. The event will be held on 2-3 December with live presentations and plenty of opportunity for discussions and engagement with community members.

We hope the Online Research Forum – *Current Issues in Language Testing & Assessment* – will attract researchers, students, practitioners, and teachers. Part of our ALTAANZ mission is to reach the broad range of professional groups who work with or are impacted by policies and practices where language and assessment intersect. For this reason, ALTAANZ does not charge membership fees and our income comes mainly from our conferences and events. In our survey, you confirmed that this is preferable to charging membership fees. The forum has a low fee which takes into consideration the different financial positions of our members. There are categories for work that is research-based as well as practical developments in assessment (e.g., test development projects, classroom assessment practice). We look forward to seeing you there!

Our AGM will also take place during the event with elections for office bearers. The positions we will be seeking nominations for are:

- Vice-President
- Secretary
- Communications Officer
- Treasurer
- Student Representatives

Our communications team, Johanna Motteram and Sharon Yahalom have been busy forging new territory for ALTAANZ on Twitter: [@ALTAANZ](#). This will give our work a new reach, alongside the many other applied linguistics and language testing and assessment organisations on Twitter. And thanks to Johanna and contributors, here we have another fantastic newsletter, replete with the human side of research and work in language testing and assessment.

Thank you for engaging with the testing and assessment community and for supporting ALTAANZ!

With warm regards,

Morena and Susy

Co-Presidents

Three PHD Journeys: Looking back and looking forward

Dr Ivy Chen	Dr Viola Lan Wei	Dr Thi Linh Giang Hoang
		

The PhD student representatives of ALTAANZ organise online events for our student community to make connections, be inspired and discuss new research and career and study related topics. The last two events were held in June and August. The event in June was all about inspiration. Three recent PhD graduates shared their incredibly varied personal experiences while completing their PhDs and then in their search for employment. The three guests were Dr Ivy Chen, Dr Viola Lan Wei and Dr Thi Linh Giang Hoang.

Ivy's research interests cover second language acquisition and assessment. Her PhD dissertation, titled *A corpus-driven receptive test of collocational knowledge*, combines these two areas. In talking about her journey, Ivy emphasised the importance of making strategic plans to achieve short and long-term goals. This resulted in a very busy PhD journey involving teaching, tutoring, being a research assistant and making connections in organisations like ALTAANZ alongside work on her

thesis. Her structured and intentional approach meant she was able to secure a position as a Research Fellow at the Language Testing Research Centre, University of Melbourne. Ivy says, “PhD journeys can often be isolating. I was happy to share my experiences and to hear from the other two panellists, who’d had very different journeys from mine.”

During Viola’s PhD years, she prioritised completing her research project, which was focused on the assessment of second language learners’ implicit and explicit English language knowledge, and how their age and language aptitude influence these two types of language knowledge. She started to work on journal papers at the end of her PhD. Viola emphasised the importance of having broad interests, collaborating with colleagues, remaining active in relevant academic associations and attending specialist workshops to hone skills and knowledge and sustain professional development as a researcher. She is currently working at DELNA (Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment), the University of Auckland, as an Academic Language Adviser, where she meets with students who are identified as those who need support for their academic English skills.

Giang’s PhD journey was also a very busy one, combining motherhood with writing up results and preparing drafts for journal articles while studying. She advocates managing time carefully to get things done while maintaining balance in life with family and exercise. Her research interests are translation studies, language assessment, and especially automated writing assessment. She has managed to combine some of these aspects into her post study work as the Head of the Translation & Interpretation Program of the English Department, at Hue University of Foreign Languages, Vietnam. Giang says, “From sharing and listening to others’ sharings, I was able to see where I need to go next in my academic aspirations. The Q&A was especially interesting to me because people could chat quite casually, and that helped with getting to know each other a bit more.”

The PhD student representatives would like to thank our three panellists for sharing their unique insights and experiences. Future student gatherings will be announced on our Facebook and Twitter pages and via our email list. We’d love to meet you soon.

Minh, Leila and Maria

Students! Don’t miss these opportunities!

Applied Linguistics Association of Australia 3-minute thesis competition – entries close 3 October

https://alaa.net.au/alaagrant/details/25/alaa_3_minute_thesis_competition

New Directions East Asia Student Research Idea awards – entries close 31 October

<https://www.britishcouncil.sg/student-research-idea-awards>

Penny McKay Award submissions close 1 November 2021

<http://www.altanz.org/penny-mckay-award.html>

PLTA update

Papers in Language Testing and Assessment (PLTA) is the international peer-reviewed journal (ESCI-indexed), published by ALTAANZ.

As a new initiative to make articles available once they have been accepted, in June PLTA published its first Early View article titled 'The effect of prompt accent on elicited imitation assessments in English as a Second Language' by Jacob G. Barrows and Troy L. Cox. This article examines the relationships among accent, accent familiarity, elicited imitation test item difficulty and test scores. Click the link below to read this article:

[The Effect of Prompt Accent on Elicited Imitation Assessments in English as a Second Language. Jacob G. Barrows & Troy L. Cox](#)

In November or December 2021, PLTA will publish a special issue with the theme 'Negotiating tensions between language assessment policies and practices: the role of the language testing professional'. This issue will feature a series of papers by staff and associates of the Language Testing Research Centre (LTRC), University of Melbourne, drawing on data from a range of the Centre's language testing projects that have involved providing policy advice to various stakeholders. The authors reflect on the different dimensions of their policy engagement, dealing with diverse stakeholders and their competing constructs and agendas.

PLTA publishes original research articles and discussion papers on language testing and assessment. We welcome submissions from both new and experienced researchers, including postgraduate research students. For further information about how to make a submission, please visit <http://www.altaanz.org/contributors.html>.

The co-editors, John Read and Jason Fan, are also interested in broadening the scope of papers published in the journal to include:

1. Articles based on pilot studies or small-scale investigations
2. Literature reviews
3. Discussions of methodological issues
4. Reports on the development of new assessments or revisions of tests
5. Discussions of policy issues and advocacy initiatives

You are encouraged to discuss making a contribution of this kind by contacting the editors at plta.editor@gmail.com.

NCEA Learning Languages Proposed Changes in Aotearoa New Zealand

As part of the National Certificate of Education (NCEA) Review in Aotearoa NZ, two new subjects for the Learning Languages area have been proposed for Levels 2 and 3. One is English as a Second Language (ESOL) and the other is Comparative Language - both provisional names. The introduction of these proposed subjects is subject to survey feedback from teachers and other stakeholders.

TESOLANZ and English Language (ESOL) teachers have been advocating for ESOL as a NZ Curriculum / NCEA approved subject for decades, so this is a very pleasing development. If ESOL becomes a subject, it will provide students learning English as a Second Language a pathway that counts towards course endorsements and University Entrance. It will also mean the introduction of external assessment which will reduce workload pressures on teachers.

The other proposed subject, Comparative Language, promises to extend and recognise learners with higher levels of proficiency in a language other than English. Currently, such learners either present evidence against standards with an inadequate level of challenge (if the language in question is already offered within NCEA) or have no opportunity to have their linguistic skills developed or officially recognised at all. This proposed subject also represents a way for speakers of heritage languages to have a key element of their cultural and linguistic identity valued and credentialled, connecting with one of the principles of the NCEA Change Programme to make the qualification more inclusive of a diverse range of learners.

Should the above proposals go ahead, TESOLANZ will be involved in consultation on the new subjects.

Julie Luxton

julielux2019@gmail.com

ALTAANZ Teacher Representative (Aotearoa NZ)

Please welcome Sharon Yahalom to the ALTAANZ Comms Team

Dr Sharon Yahalom is a lecturer in the Student Academic Support Unit at Monash University in Melbourne. She assists nursing students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to develop their clinical communication skills for placement. Sharon's research interests include language testing and assessment, English for specific purposes and healthcare communication. She completed her PhD in applied linguistics at The University of Melbourne in late 2019.

Johanna and Sharon are collaborating on everything to do with ALTAANZ communications and her strategic thinking, social media know-how and fresh perspectives are extremely welcome.



PhD Completion Celebration!

Student Rep Maria Treadaway talks with Denise Angelo about her PhD Path.

Full name: **Dr Denise Leigh Angelo**

Title of thesis: **Countering misrecognition of contact languages and their ecologies in Australia**

Supervisor: **Jane Simpson, ANU**

Year of completion: **2021**



Denise is now a researcher and sessional lecturer at the Australian National University, with a long-standing association with ALTAANZ. From 2016 – 2020, Denise served as the Treasurer and is now currently serving as the teacher representative for Australian Schools. Recently, she completed her PhD. This interview captures some of her triumphs and challenges.

Interviewer: Well first of all, congratulations!! It must feel amazing to have everything done and with no corrections (I'm hugely inspired by this)! How do you feel now? How has life changed since completing your PhD?

Denise: My overwhelming reaction has been one of great relief, I wondered if I would ever finish (shhh, don't tell my supervisor). Followed by gratitude to everybody who's worked with me and taught me over the years.

Interviewer: Yes. It can be a pretty long and arduous journey...Can you tell me about your thesis?

I did a thesis by publication which means I assembled a suite of publications, some co-authored. I then wrote an exegesis explaining how the topic had been explored and addressed.

Interviewer: Is it unusual in your field to complete a PhD like this?

Yes, I don't think a PhD by publication (also called "by compilation") is at all common in linguistics. I'd never even heard about it till my colleague Catherine Hudson (who's also an ALTAANZ Teacher Representative) told me about it a few years back! But I didn't go in that direction at first. I was doing a lot of work in addition to my PhD (e.g. community vernacular books, contributing to National Indigenous Languages Report, Language Ecologies explained interviews, Indigenous Languages in Education working paper for the OECD etc). A lot of that work kept pulling me back to how Indigenous contact languages are inadequately acknowledged in policy, data, education and other services in Australia.

This kept reminding me that I had quite a lot to say to a heap of people on this topic (☺) and that it would be useful to publish now rather than wait till after the PhD. My supervisor Jane Simpson has told me she thinks a PhD by publication is very useful for some students, particularly for mature age students with professional experiences who are writing on applied topics and are trying to reach a variety of different audiences.

Interviewer: So how many publications form the thesis? Is it publicly available? It would be interesting to see...

The rules about a PhD by publication vary heaps from institution to institution. I included 9 publications, some co-authored. I wrote a few introductory chapters and then divided the papers into sections. In the introduction, I included a personal orientation to the topic as well as background on various concepts and contexts. Then for each section I wrote introductions to each publication including how they address the overall topic. I included the publications as appendices. If you're interested, it's here: <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/227145>

Interviewer: Thanks for that! So was there anything else that convinced you that this path might work for you?

Well, the fact that I'd been writing lots of articles and chapters helped. The wonderful people I wrote with helped a lot too.

Interviewer: You mentioned the exegesis as providing a cohesive thread. Can you tell us a bit more about this? Do you have any advice for people considering this form?

To be honest, I found the exegesis really hard to write. I have many versions that I started and couldn't bring off. One piece of advice that might help others is to think about how the pieces work, as a whole, right from the start and continually. I think I took it for granted that it would all fall into place, but actually I had to work hard to tell a coherent story. (In my PhD, each publication tackled contact languages but from the perspectives of a wide range of different disciplines and methodologies (e.g. grammatical analysis, historical surveys, teacher interviews, student assessment, community poster projects), and at really different levels of granularity (world, Australia, local community, individual)).

Another piece of advice is to try to find some PhDs by publication that give you a few ideas, even if it's to rule out what they've done, it still helps you fine tune your ideas. The PhDs by compilation in science disciplines weren't that useful: They really seemed to consist of publications on the same very tightly focussed topic (or at least the ones I found, and/or as far as I could understand). The PhDs in the creative arts were also not all that helpful, but I got a glimmer of the way forward - a personal orientation to the topic, some background, and some reflections on the pieces of work (in my case publications, not artwork). Then, I was also lucky that Cathy Bow submitted her PhD by publication on *Entanglements of digital technologies and Indigenous languages in the Northern Territory* before me. So that was a tangible example of how she had dealt with an exegesis in an applied linguistics thesis (Susy Macqueen, current ALTAANZ co-president was one of Cathy's supervisors).

Interviewer: Yes. I can see how challenging it would be to find the ‘connective tissue’ drawing all these perspectives together.

Yes. I eventually settled on the concept of “misrecognition”, and more particularly countering it, which worked as an overarching concept. I was pleased that it pointed to some of the dynamics at work - and it’s not been used in linguistics or creolistics (the study of creoles and contact languages) before as far as I’m aware. Also “language ecologies” helped as a rationale for the different types of languages included, like contact languages and Standard Australian English.

Interviewer: It’s fascinating hearing about the particular challenges of writing this kind of thesis. Can you tell us a bit more about your topic?

So in my thesis I explored the dynamics and ramifications of misrecognition of Indigenous contact languages and their ecologies. I approached it from multiple perspectives (policy, linguistic, historical, educational and community). Likewise, I provided multiple means for counteracting this misrecognition in these different fields.

As for the thesis topic, well, as I mentioned earlier, it’s not what I started on (I was thinking of writing a grammatical description of a language at the start). In fact, I had a few starts along the way (apologies to my long-suffering supervisor), but I ended up here instead. As well as what I said before about realising there was a need to address this topic, there’s also the fact that for much of my life I’ve worked in Indigenous communities in Australia where contact languages are spoken - they have been a constant feature of the local language ecologies I’d worked in. The extra work I’d undertaken since I moved to Canberra reminded me again of how little recognition is afforded this type of language, even today, and just how unfair this can be for speakers and their communities.

Interviewer: Significant work for everyone... What are some of the fields you’d really like to see your ‘counteractions’ put into action to perhaps achieve more equity?

Well, one mechanism is to consistently include considerations of language ecologies in place-based policies and services - so many services are focussed on a place, like schools, health clinics and hospitals, banks, courts etc. Over the years, I’ve developed a typology of language ecologies, a framework that helps outsiders and people who aren’t language-informed to navigate under-recognised post-colonial Indigenous language contexts. For example, it asks to what extent traditional languages and/or a contact language and/or Englishes are used by Indigenous residents. It’s common sense really, isn’t it, but sadly not a feature of our Indigenous policies, such as Closing the Gap. You can see an example of a language ecology approach in a submission that Susy Macqueen and Cath Hudson and I wrote to the Productivity Commission on the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy here: https://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/244901/sub076-indigenous-evaluation.pdf

Interviewer: OK. So, a large focus on influencing. And what about the assessment aspect of your work?

Denise: Language proficiency assessment figures in my thesis as a tool for revealing mismatches between Indigenous students with contact language backgrounds who are learners of Standard Australian English but who are taught through ill-suited monolingual English-only approaches. A chicken and egg language assessment scenario is also explored: L2 proficiency assessment in school

settings usually occurs where students are identified via demographic questionnaires as speakers of an L1 (i.e. different to the target L2). So how does L2 proficiency assessment work where Indigenous students speak unrecognised contact languages, languages derived from a fusion of languages including English, which are often misrecognised as a form of the target L2, i.e. as English?

Interviewer: Wow! Lots of important questions for you and others to look at! What did you enjoy most about your PhD? And what were the greatest challenges you faced doing your research?

Denise: The freedom of having some clear space for thinking and writing is such a privilege. But that's a double-edged sword too, as not being part of a team endeavour is also hard for me.

Interviewer: Yes. It can be a lonely pursuit. Do you have any advice for new PhD students who venture into Language Testing and Assessment?

Denise: Geez... The area of Language Testing and Assessment has such potential for positive impact, for social justice and equitable outcomes in education and beyond. I found it useful to have some clear reasons like this to keep me going sometimes. The other big factor is having good colleagues and fellow PhD travellers who will support you.

Interviewer: I agree. The social consequences and impact of assessment practices are so important and yet possibly under-researched. And where to from here? For you? For your research?

I'm incredibly fortunate to have a part time research position at the Australian National University with an ARC-funded project with great colleagues. This research project builds on aspects of my PhD, *Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Ecologies*. Plus I've got lots of other projects on the go, working with traditional Aboriginal languages, such as with Aboriginal people who are "reigniting" the Dharug language of the Sydney basin area and with various projects involving English as an Additional Language/Dialect for Indigenous pre-school and school-aged learners and their teachers.

Interviewer: That's a lot of projects! Good luck with these and we look forward to hearing more about them in the future. Thanks so much for taking the time to share you journey with us. And once again, congratulations on your hard work and success.

Join us at the ALTAANZ
Online Research Forum
2021.

Abstract Submissions due 5th
October



LTRC 2021

Report from Leila Zohali

The 42nd Language Testing Research Colloquium (LTRC), the annual conference of the International Language Testing Association (ILTA), took place virtually due to the pandemic, from June 14 to 17, 2021. LTRC 2021 was ILTA's first ever virtual conference. The theme of the conference was 'Assessment in Multilingual Contexts: Models, Practices, Policies & Challenges' with invited plenary speakers Glenn Fulcher as this year's Messick Lecture Award speaker, Cathie Elder as this year's Distinguished Achievement Lecture Award speaker, and Fred Davidson as the Alan Davies Lecture Award speaker.

The conference included pre-conference workshops, a pre-conference roundtable, opening symposium, invited symposia, three lectures, paper presentations, demonstrations, poster presentations and work-in-progress presentations. There were also some networking sessions which were impressive for conference newcomers.

The highlight of the virtual LTRC 2021 were the platforms used for the conference, Whova and Wonder which made access and communication highly straightforward and interactive. In Whova, all the presentations were pre-recorded with the option for conference attendees to note down questions about the presentations. Live streams were also recorded and all the attendees had access to the recordings. This access is extended for six months after the conference. This is particularly important as the timing of the conference (EDT) was not suitable for some people in other parts of the world, including Australia and New Zealand. Through Wonder, which was a web-based platform, attendees were able to network with each other 24 hours a day.

ALTAANZ was represented by attendees and presenters from both Australia and New Zealand. Cathie Elder, former co-president of ALTAANZ presented a live lecture on 'Responding to policy imperatives: Can language testers do more?'. Ute Knoch, ALTAANZ vice-president, in collaboration with Cathie Elder, reported on a research paper titled 'Drawing on repeat test takers to study test preparation practices and their links to score gains'. John Read, PLTA co-editor, had a discussion in one of the invited symposia on 'Multilingual assessment in Africa and the MENA region'. Jason Fan, another PLTA co-editor, also presented a research paper titled 'Understanding the construct of translation as a mediating language activity: The process-oriented perspective'. In addition to these fascinating presentations, it was with great pleasure and honour that some of the past and present ALTAANZ committee members were announced as recipients of the following awards:

Cambridge/ILTA Distinguished Achievement Award

Cathie Elder, from the University of Melbourne, Australia

ILTA Advocacy/Public Engagement Award

2020 Winner: Ute Knoch, Cathie Elder, and Tim McNamara, from the Language Testing Research Centre at the University of Melbourne, Australia

ILTA-Sage Best Book Award 2020

Knoch, Ute & Macqueen, Susy (2019). *Assessing English for Professional Purposes*. New York: Routledge.

TIRF 2019 Doctoral Dissertation Grant

Maria Treadaway: PhD candidate, The University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Despite being held online, LTRC 2021 was highly engaging and a great success. Since the LTRC committee received positive feedback regarding the virtual conference, it was recommended that the next LTRC be held in a hybrid mode. LTRC 2022 was first planned to be held at Waseda University, Tokyo from March 7 to 11 with the theme 'Linking assessment to language learning and teaching'. However, due to the ongoing situation with the pandemic and travel restrictions being still in place, ILTA and the LTRC 2022 Committee decided that the conference will be held online. The online mode will promote accessibility, particularly for graduate students.

Leila Zohali, PhD Candidate, The University of Melbourne, ALTAANZ Student Representative

Online Event on Language Testing for Migration Report from John Read

In collaboration with the University of Reading, the British Council hosted an online panel discussion on "Future-proofing language tests for migration purposes" on 25 June. The event consisted of three panels that dealt with overlapping themes related to the topic. Despite the title, the main focus was on recent trends and the current situation for migrants, particularly in Europe and Australia, rather than on how language tests might be designed to address the issues in the future.

The first panel, chaired by Bart Deygers of Ghent University in Belgium, dealt primarily with migration policies and the role of language tests in implementing them. The speakers were Zvezda Vankova, a legal expert at Lund University; Tony Capstick, an applied linguist at the University of Reading; and Ute Knoch, Director of the LTRC at the University of Melbourne. Increasingly countries require applicants for migration and citizenship to obtain a minimum score on a language test, as well as to demonstrate knowledge of the host country's culture. This raises a number of human rights issues for disadvantaged groups such as the elderly, disabled people, refugees and partners subject to family violence. The issues include the cost of the designated tests, the availability of test preparation courses, and the appropriateness of the test content for those with lower levels of education and lack of competence in the standard language variety on which the test is based. Although the Council of Europe recommends CEFR A2 as the threshold level for migrants, some countries require B1.

Ute talked about a legislative proposal before the Australian Parliament in 2017 to impose a minimum score of 6.0 on IELTS for citizenship, in addition to the existing cultural knowledge test. The law was eventually voted down in the Senate by opposition parties on various grounds. For

Cathie Elder, who appeared at a Senate hearing on the bill, it was valuable to learn the importance of being able to communicate effectively with policymakers and the media on language testing issues.

The second panel included Nick Saville (Cambridge Assessment English), Tim McNamara (University of Melbourne) and Bart Deygers, with Barry O'Sullivan (British Council) as chair. The theme was *Constructs, operationalization, reliability and bias*, but much of the discussion expanded on points made by the first panel. Bart pointed to the need for functional literacy in modern societies for immigrants and citizens alike to facilitate national integration, but there was little evidence that current language policies were achieving that goal. According to Nick, opportunities to learn language were still too school-focused and community learning environments needed to be created, along with the encouragement of translanguaging, which allows people to draw on the various languages they have some knowledge of. Nick saw this as flowing through into plurilingual assessments for migrants that were flexible and used AI ethically to overcome the limitations of current language tests.

The two speakers for the third panel, on Consequences and validation, were Cecilie Carlsen, a language tester at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, and Barry O'Sullivan. Cecilie reviewed developments in Europe and made the point that tests for migrants were more political symbols than functional communication instruments. This had been nicely illustrated by Tim McNamara in the previous panel discussion in relation to the civics test for US citizenship. Applicants can access the whole bank of test items in advance and there is a high pass rate, which is a very satisfactory situation for immigration advocates, to the extent that they lobbied successfully against the introduction of a language test that would assess the actual communicative ability of citizenship candidates. Barry talked movingly about his own experience as the child of Irish immigrants to the UK. He also emphasised the importance of language testers being able to talk to native-born citizens of the host country and to understand their values.

Upcoming events in Language Testing

21-22 October 2021 UKALTA Language Assessment Symposium

<https://language-assessment-ukalta.weebly.com/>

2-3 December 2021 ALTAANZ Online Research Forum

<http://www.altaanz.org/call-for-proposals.html>

10-11 December 2021 New Directions East Asia

<https://www.britishcouncil.sg/new-directions-2021>

7-11 March 2022 Language Testing Research Colloquium

<https://www.iltaonline.com/page/LTRC2022>