BOOK REVIEW

David Wei Dai. *Assessing interactional competence: Principles, test development and validation through an L2 Chinese IC test.* Peter Lang. 2024. Pp. 440.

Assessing interactional competence: Principles, test development and validation through an L2 Chinese IC test, by David Wei Dai, is an expanded and refined version of the author's award-winning PhD dissertation, which received the 2023 American Association of Applied Linguistics Dissertation Award. This substantial volume presents a comprehensive and methodologically rigorous account of the test development and validation of a computer-mediated communication (CMC) interactional competence (IC) test for second language (L2) Chinese speakers. Although research on IC assessment has been growing, persistent theoretical and practical tensions remain between construct representation and test development, warranting further research and discussion. In light of this, the volume integrates conceptual, methodological, and empirical dimensions in examining validity evidence in IC test development using a cross-disciplinary approach.

This book is organized into eight chapters, progressing from conceptual foundations to empirical validation. Chapter 1 introduces the rationale for the study, situating the need for interactionally grounded speaking assessment within the broader contexts in language assessment and applied linguistics. Chapter 2 lays the theoretical and conceptual groundwork for the study. It begins with an in-depth discussion of the philosophical and conceptual underpinnings of IC, tracing its development across different theoretical and disciplinary traditions. In particular, this chapter provides an important discussion of how IC is related to and sufficiently different from linguistic competence (LC). In addition, Dai argues for the importance of moving beyond the mechanistic sequential characteristics of IC to include emotional, logical, and moral IC dimensions. After building the conceptual basis of IC, the remainder of Chapter 2 discusses previous research on IC test design and rating. Chapter 3 outlines the overall research design and validation framework that guides the study. Central to this chapter is Kane's argument-based validation framework, which structures the validation process as a chain of

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interrelated inferences. Dai effectively uses this framework as a logical architecture for organizing the research, with each subsequent empirical chapter providing evidence to support specific inferences and underlying assumptions.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 constitute the empirical core of the book and are among its most compelling sections. These chapters present three interrelated studies that collectively generate the evidential basis for the validity argument. Each study addresses specific assumptions within Kane's interpretive framework while progressively refining the IC construct, assessment tasks, and scoring procedures of the IC test. Each chapter also demonstrates a high level of methodological rigor and could stand alone as an independent research study. Chapter 4 reports the first study, which centers on task-based needs analysis (TBNA) and test design. Drawing on rich qualitative data, Dai identifies critical social actions, interactional challenges, and sociopragmatic demands in the target language use domain, which lead to the finalization of the IC test. Particularly noteworthy is the multi-stage iterative process of item development, review, trials, and pre-pilots. This chapter convincingly illustrates how TBNA can move beyond a procedural requirement to function as substantive validity evidence for domain description and test authenticity. Chapter 5 shifts the focus to administering the IC test alongside the development of rating criteria and rating materials. Through pilot testing and extensive analysis of domain experts' indigenous criteria, Dai adopts a data-driven approach to rating criteria development that foregrounds locally grounded understandings of IC. For example, one of the most salient evaluative dimensions identified by domain experts is *conflict management*, which highlights context-specific expectations of mediating interpersonal tension through strategies, such as softening disagreement and downgrading disaffiliation using indirect language or action. One of the major strengths of this chapter lies in its innovative use of sequential-categorial analysis, which combines the methods of Conversation Analysis (CA) and Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA). This approach is used to generate context-specific features for designing rating criteria, as well as to provide precise definitions for analytical categories included within the rating criteria. Chapter 6 presents the main testing study, in which the IC test is administered to 105 L2 Chinese test-takers. Using many-facet Rasch analysis, Dai provides robust and satisfactory quantitative evidence for the reliability and internal

functioning of the test. Beyond the quantitative functionality of the test itself, this chapter extends the scope of analysis to the stakeholder perspective on test authenticity and pedagogical value. The inclusion of the test-takers' perspectives is particularly commendable, as it addresses an often-overlooked aspect of test validation. Taken together, Chapters 4 to 6 exemplify a comprehensive and methodologically sophisticated approach to IC test development and validation. Chapter 7 brings together the findings of the three studies and consolidates them within the coherent argument-based validation framework. Returning to the chain of inferences outlined in Chapter 3, Dai systematically evaluates the extent to which the accumulated evidence supports the domain description, evaluation, generalization, explanation, and extrapolation inferences. Chapter 7 successfully synthesizes a large and methodologically diverse body of evidence into a unified validity argument, demonstrating how qualitative insights and quantitative findings contribute to construct validation. For anyone interested in adopting Kane's validity argument framework in a validation study, Chapter 7 can function as an exemplary illustration of how the evidence is coherently and systematically woven into an argument. The book concludes with Chapter 8, which summarizes the main findings, highlights the study's contributions, acknowledges the study's limitations, and outlines directions for future research.

What distinguishes this volume from existing research on IC assessment is its systematic and empirically grounded approach to operationalizing and validating IC in a computer-mediated assessment context. In particular, the use of domain experts' indigenous rating criteria and the integration of CA and MCA represent both theoretical advancement and methodological innovations. The rating criteria are first derived from domain experts' comments and are subsequently validated and refined using CA and MCA. Through this process, Dai adopts a unified approach to defining and operationalizing IC, drawing on multiple disciplinary perspectives and extending IC into emotional, logical, and moral dimensions. At the same time, these very strengths could introduce certain challenges for readers. The density of the theoretical discussion may reduce accessibility for readers who are less familiar with the epistemological foundations surrounding IC and the relationship between IC and LC. While the rich theoretical and empirical grounding of rating criteria that includes emotional, logical, and moral dimensions is conceptually

compelling, the overall complexity of the rating criteria may raise questions about their immediate applicability, particularly in contexts such as rater training and resource-constrained classroom assessment. That said, this tension is not unique to this volume, but reflects a broader challenge within IC assessment research more generally. Precisely because of this tension, Dai's adoption of a CMC-based IC test becomes particularly meaningful, as it enhances administrative feasibility. Language testers and practitioners are therefore likely to find practical insights for designing interactionally grounded CMC-based IC tests that are both valid and feasible in real-life contexts.

Overall, this book makes a significant and timely contribution to the field of IC assessment. Conceptually, Dai advances the IC construct by extending IC to encompass emotional, logical, and moral dimensions, thereby pushing the boundaries of how IC can be assessed. Methodologically, this volume stands out for its rigorous and multi-layered approach to test development and validation. This book will be of value to a wide audience. For novice researchers, it provides a detailed and concrete discussion of how IC can be defined, operationalized, and validated. Beyond the specific focus on IC, this book serves as an exemplary model for those interested in principled test development by providing step-by-step details on how a validity argument can be constructed and supported. For experienced researchers, the volume engages with complex and often contentious issues, including the nuanced relationship between IC and LC. Importantly, this book advances a compelling argument for a cross-disciplinary inquiry, encouraging researchers to move beyond their disciplines toward meaningful language teaching and assessment.

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The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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