

Book Review:
The Companion to Language Assessment

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The Companion to Language Assessment, edited by Antony John Kunnan, consists of four volumes encompassing 140 current topics of language assessment in a variety of contexts. All 196 contributors to this *Companion* are well-known scholars who are professors, researchers, and practitioners from all around the world.

As its title suggests, *Volume I* focuses on the three must-know components of language assessment: *Abilities, Contexts, and Learners*. It presents argumentative evidence and support of progress in language assessment over the last 50 years. Topics within this volume comprise the types of assessment of discrete and integrated language skills; the various contexts where such assessment takes place, both in the academia and in the professional arena; and finally, how these ranges of contexts and assessment affect language learners, language instructors, as well

as professionals whose industry hinges on its practitioners' language ability.

The content of *Volume I* is presented in a structure that helps readers logically and easily follow the historical development of language assessment as the topics unfold. The language used throughout this volume is easy to understand although it contains language assessment and education jargons; therefore, some background knowledge in such areas is required. Still, it is suitable for a diverse group of readers. For teachers and researchers, this volume offers a repertoire of language assessment theories and current practices. For scholars and field practitioners, the volume offers both the *how* and the *what* of language assessment in particular professional settings and for certain types of learners. This volume is thus well-served as a reference for researchers, developers, and users of language assessment.

Volume II of the *Companion* concerns the *Approaches and Development* of language assessment. It starts off with a discussion on various assessment approaches, ranging from the well-known norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessment to the more recently-adopted approach of computer-assisted assessment. Then, it presents topics on different types of assessment, focusing on assessment *for* learning in the classroom, such as portfolio assessment, dynamic assessment, diagnostic feedback, and peer- and self-assessment. It then continues with a discussion on elements to be contemplated during the assessment development process -- from construct definition, to consideration on test-wiseness strategy in relation to task development, to cheating detection -- before finally finishing off with a "forward-looking" concept of technology in assessment design and scoring procedures.

What distinguishes this volume from general textbooks is that it covers issues beyond the general assessment theories and offers practical "food for thoughts" on such everyday matters as how to monitor students' progress and how to detect plagiarism, as well as such timely matters as how to incorporate technology into language assessment. This volume is thus suitable for

researchers, teachers, and practitioners who are in search of new knowledge in, or even inspiration from, the field of language assessment.

The focus of *Volume III* is on *Evaluation, Methodology, and Interdisciplinary Themes* in language assessment. It is organized around the conceptual issues of evaluation design, such as research validation, fairness and justice, and test taker accommodations. Different approaches to research analysis, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, are also discussed. This volume then closes with chapters on how language assessment can be linked with such interdisciplinary perspectives as philosophy, cognitive mechanisms of second language performance, language acquisition, and legal contexts.

The first half of the volume exposes its readers to various measurement theories as well as statistical methods. Several formulas, equations, and calculations are presented together with charts, graphs, and tables in order to aid understanding, but those who are not mathematics-oriented may still find it relatively difficult to follow. However, the authors seem to be aware of this issue, as additional notes and appendices are included to provide further clarification. The second half of the volume is more descriptive, and the explanation of each topic/sub-topic more comprehensible and concise. *Volume III* is especially helpful for readers who want to learn more about the frameworks of, or explore more practical techniques in, the development and evaluation of a language assessment.

Volume IV: Assessment Around the World reviews the implementation of language assessment principles in testing, measuring, evaluating, and assessing the variety of Englishes and other languages, with regard to linguistic differences, pedagogical implementation, assessment needs, and specific contextual requirements. This volume discusses the assessment practices of ESL, EFL, and lingua franca in all six continents. Additionally, it portrays language assessment in 35 languages, ranging from logograms and phonograms to dialects and sign languages, and

includes aspects of culture, skills, and contexts specifically required in each variety of the language being assessed.

One outstanding characteristic that makes this volume beneficial and applicable for those interested in a worldwide movement of language assessment is that it talks about language assessment that is being implemented throughout the world, as a part of both globalization and localization. The volume exemplifies motives derived from needs analysis in communication, employment, education, and culture, which drive specific frameworks for language test constructs and content. It also shows how assessment principles are adopted and adapted to fit the context under practice, as well as what challenges and gaps in language assessment research are to be further examined. Thus, this volume acts as a comprehensive wrap-up for those who have read *Volume I* to *Volume III*, yet at the same time offers language assessment practitioners insights into assessment of a variety of languages, Englishes or otherwise.

On the whole, this *Companion* provides a complete picture of current trends in language assessment and, with its topics clearly organized by themes, allows readers to easily explore the chapters in a customized manner. The language used in the four volumes is also reader-friendly, although some background knowledge is required to understand language assessment and education jargons. In all, *The Companion to Language Assessment* is a practical reference for researchers, teachers, and practitioners in, or even those who are learning about, the field of language assessment.

The Reviewers

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