

With all the controversy surrounding both the practical value and the effectiveness of language-learning tasks, this collection of articles has offered various insight into the questions, stilled a number of doubts and answered a number of queries on the part of language educators. Candlin's and Breen's articles, though they do have a tendency to be programmatic as well as linguistically and conceptually complicated in some parts, serve as useful guidelines for educators to judge both the tasks, the teaching and evaluating procedures that the teachers use. From Littlejohn and Hick, Somerville and Ryan and Coleman, language teachers may get some answers to the problems of how to handle slow learners and large classes whereas those involved in research into classroom interactions and staff development will benefit from Wright's report.

This collection is thus valuable addition to any EFL library; it is strongly recommended for those who have made or are considering making tasks an integral part of their classroom teaching experience as well as those who are considering so in the future.

### **New Directions in Language Testing**

Y.P. Lee et al. (Eds.) Pergamon Press, 1985, pp. 170

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This book was published as a selection of papers presented at the International Symposium on Language Testing which was organized by Language Centre of the University of Hong Kong in December, 1982.

The participants came from ten countries, so the symposium consisted of a number of extremely interesting papers. Moreover, it included four plenary sessions conducted by the following guest speakers whose views on testing are also published in this book: Alan Davies (University of Edinburgh), Randall Jones (Brigham Young University, Utah), Pauline Rea (University of Dar Es Salaam), and Merrill Swain (Modern Language Centre, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto). However, due to the fact that a wide variety of themes related testing was presented, the organizers were forced to focus only on the two they deemed to be of the utmost importance: direct or performance testing, and large-scale testing.

The book, therefore, consists of an edited selection of fifteen of the papers presented as well as all four of the papers presented at the plenary sessions. The papers have been reorganized to form four sections: Language Testing and the Curriculum, Large-Scale Testing, Testing Oral Proficiency and Validating Language Tests, respectively.

The first section, Language Testing and the Curriculum, was based on the two plenary sessions and forms a good introduction to current trends in language testing. Both papers in this section are readable but rich in detail. Beginning with Davies, he seems to disagree with the earlier conviction namely that the "normal" relation between language teaching and language testing is the "push" from language teaching to language testing, i.e., the demand to set up achievement tests. Besides, he points out that "all such relationships are two-way affairs and that language testing can lead language teaching; it does not always have to follow. Moreover, he also states that the test/examination is a major and creative influence for change and development in language teaching. Most testing, he maintains, does of course follow from the syllabus and the teaching in the sense that most testing is a check on achievement; hence the term is normally called achievement tests. Nevertheless, he draws our attention to the fact that creative and innovative testing, which often starts as a proficiency test, charts a slight detour and, in doing so, can successfully initiate a

syllabus change or even a new syllabus, thus effectively turning it into an achievement test. He also asserts that a good proficiency test allows itself to be outdated—i.e., it becomes an achievement test for a particular teaching syllabus, thereby permitting a new proficiency test to be constructed that is more appropriate for developing ideas of language teaching and learning.

Rea, like Davies, maintains that testing should not be seen as something divorced from language teaching. The writer states that the purpose of her paper is threefold. Firstly, it examines three case studies which show the role of language testing within the teaching syllabus. Secondly, the paper reviews briefly the state-of-the-art of communicative language testing in addition to outlining proposals for the classification of test items within the context of communicative teaching of English. Thirdly, the final part outlines dimensions of language testing for teaching purposes, with an overview of assessment procedures, integrated within one of the Communication Skills in English courses offered at the University of Dar Es Salaam.

The second section, *Large-Scale Testing*, contains attempts to solve the problem of how to reconcile recent ideas on communicative testing with the reality of large numbers of students and the lack of sufficient time and money to spend on testing each individual student.

Swain highlights four general principles of communicative language testing, which she found highly relevant when faced with the practical problems of developing a communicative test of speaking and writing that could be administered on a large scale. The four principles are :

1. Start from somewhere—test development should build from existing knowledge and examples,
2. Concentrate on content—i.e. the content of the material used as the basis of communicative language activities and the tasks used to elicit communicative behaviour,
3. Bias for best—do everything possible to elicit the learners' maximum performance,
4. Work for washback—the effect a test has on teaching practices.

These four principles assume a pedagogical function to language testing as well as a scientific approach to language test design and implementation.

Van Elek discusses the recent work done on the long-running project to develop self-assessment tests for adult learners of English in Sweden, particularly adult migrants.

Young and Gui discuss recent work on the development of a national language proficiency test (of English) for young adults in China.

Zettersten, in a similar spirit, discusses the work being done in Denmark to develop large-scale tests of lexical skills, with a special focus on ways in which such tests can be computerized.

The third section, *Testing Oral Proficiency*, begins with an overview by Randall Jones. He presents ten important considerations regarding the testing of oral language proficiency. His ten basic considerations are as follows: purpose of the instrument, resources of the instrument, the essence of an oral test, examiner/examinee relationship, degree of directness, examinee's language learning history, levels of proficiency, proficiency and achievement tests, the evaluation criterion and global and discrete scoring. He also puts forward the ideas, with regard to the measurement of oral proficiency, that it is not only desirable but absolutely essential and that it would also be possible if certain carefully outlined procedures were carefully followed.

Both Morrison and Lee, and Berkoff give details of attempts to construct and validate tests aimed at measuring the oral skills of university students by means of a group-testing approach.

Pendergast summarizes work done over the last few years in Japan in developing a very rapid (2–3 minute) test of oral ability where the examiner is assisted by a "testside" computer.

The fourth section, comes under the heading of Validating Language Tests. This section is organized from the more general to the more mathematical; the last paper, in particular the one by Griffin, is clearly mathematical in orientation. It contains recent work done on virtually every major dimension of validity: predictive validity (Low and Lee, Fok), face validity (Stevenson) and construct validity (Lee).

In conclusion, *New Directions in Language Testing* is one of the most useful reference books in testing published nowadays. It contains papers that are of interest and use to a wide variety of readers, from research workers attempting to develop new ways of designing and validating tests, to language teachers who would like to know what has been going on in this field over the last few years and who would like a framework for dealing with the multiple variations on the theme of communicative or direct or performance testing.