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(Book Review)***



***Exploring Language Assessment and Testing. Anthony Green. Routledge, London and New York (2014). xii + 269 pp., ISBN: 987-00415-59724-1 (pbk).***

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Rendering a straightforward introduction and an all-inclusive overview for anyone concerned with common assessment issues in pedagogy and applied linguistics, the seminal work of Anthony Green, *Exploring Language Assessment and Testing*, proves to be adequate for the purpose. The book designates its overriding focus on apprising its practitioners -- "students embarking on Masters level or teacher education courses, as well as students in the closing stages of undergraduate study" (p. xv) -- on the practice of language assessment and testing while not leaving behind the techniques of making for and improving good-quality assessments. The book is divided into three major parts; Part I focuses on the practice of language assessment which and includes four chapters. Chapters 5 and 6 in Part II concentrate on theoretical insights imparting the process described in part I. Part III of the book which incorporates the last chapter, i.e. chapter 7, maps out assessment trends in progress as well as controversies in the field.

The first Chapter, *Putting Language Assessment in its Place*, sets out to outline what is meant by language assessment and what its stance in language education is. According to the author, the current inexorable link between assessment and teaching stands in contrast to the traditional views of teacher training within which process teachers' *assessment literacy* was foreign. However, the kind of language used by individuals always serves as an impetus for us as practitioners of assessment as well as others to form inferences about people and to base judgments on. In the field of language education, this basis resonates the concept of *language assessment* and what is typically observed as language *knowledge, ability, and skills* of the individuals involved. Another area of misconception is taking *testing* and *assessment* as one, whereas the former can only be an option to contribute to the latter. As regards learning a language, individuals may embark on such an undertaking through different sources. Ways of adding new skills to one's repertoire are summed into *imitation, being*

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*taught*, or *working with others* by the author. Each of these strategies and ways of assessing them occupy a certain amount of the chapter. According to the author, even though the desire to assess any of these strategies might appear to be quite straightforward, assessing the kind of collective social learning involved in the last strategy can prove to be difficult, especially when traditionally established tests are put in place.

The main intent of Chapter 2, *Purposes for Assessment*, is to explicate the purposes for assessment which are subsumed under the two broad categories of *educational assessment* and *proficiency assessment*. The former, which is also referred to as *assessment of learning*, applies to the occasions when the teachers exercise assessments to measure the content that has been taught; however, the assessment of a person's language ability and current functionality to carry out predetermined standards, which is probably beyond teachers' responsibility, pertains to proficiency assessment or *assessment for learning*. The types of tests which apply to each category have also been enclosed in the discussion. The following chapter unravels a common thread running through each assessment purpose, i.e., the need for an ongoing improvement into the development and use of a test.

The two concepts of *standards* and *quality management* in assessment make up the content of Chapter 3 – *The Practice of Language Assessment*. As White (1998) holds, the features which contribute to an assessment's living up to the expectations, and hence making the service desirable, lead to favorable standards; while the characteristics which lead to surpassing the standards and continuously adding up to their efficiency, underpin quality assessment. Preoccupied with ameliorating the overall effectiveness of an assessment, the author believes it can come at a PRICE; where PRICE entails the principles in which *Planning* and *Reflection* harbor *Improvement* if only buttressed by *Cooperation* which is to be directed by *Evidence*. This process is best viewed as a continuous cycle with its relevant seven stages and their associated components. The bare bone essentials of stages 1 and 2 are *designers*, *objectives*, *specifications*, *producers*, and *assessment forms*; stages 3 and 4 take in *organizers*, *guidelines*, *assesses*, and *performance* as their elements. *Administrators*, *reports*, *scorers*, *results*, *users*, and *decisions* comprise the building blocks of the last stages.

In Chapter 4, *The Qualities of Effective Assessment System*, the author attends, in detail, to the qualities on which assessments could be judged. Presenting the qualities in the order of *Practicality*, *Reliability*, and *Validity* – each elucidated with respective classifications and relevant treatments (c.f. Douglas, 2010; Messick, 1989) – with all giving rise to *Beneficial Consequences* helps inform the design of an assessment and apply the PRICE principles. However, according to the author, it should be kept in mind that no assessment can fully satisfy all four qualities and that it would be inevitable to obtain only an estimate of the values. Consequently, users would be better off using an assessment that "is a justifiable use of resources because it is a better basis for decisions and leads to better consequences than the alternatives" (p. 94).

Developing assessments for different purposes necessitates setting down how the nature of the assessment tasks will affect the kind of linguistic knowledge the learners draw on. Chapters 5 and 6, titled *Assessing Receptive Skills* and *Assessing Productive and Interactive Skills*, respectively, deal mainly with designing and scoring of receptive, productive, and interactive skills. Admitting the difficulty involved in measuring the skills, the author points out to the need for getting the learners to do 'something else' in order to assess receptive skills; the assessment of the latter skills can be

supported through the use of strong or weak forms of 'performance assessment'. The chapters also feature a number of preliminaries as regards assessing each skill, along with practical guidelines for putting the process into action along the following steps: a) defining the nature of the skill, b) specifying appropriate texts for use, and c) singling out proper kinds of tasks that best represent the texts chosen. Moreover, procedures for standard setting – whose ramifications are *assessment-centered* and *assessee-centered* methods – and for reporting the results of assessment – which fall into the sub-categories of *impressionistic scoring*, *error counting*, *checklists*, *rating scales*, *task-specific vs. generic scales*, and *holistic vs. analytic scales* – have been tackled in enough detail.

At the close of the book, Chapter 7 – *Multiplication and Division: Trends in Language Assessment* – turns the spotlight onto the theoretical ideas informing the touched issues in parts I and II of the book, especially for those who wish to go deeper into the literature of assessment. The chapter provides the readers with: "developments in allied fields, shifting goals for language education, the proper relationship between assessment and teaching, the nature of communicative competence and language proficiency, technological change, and ethical and critical approaches" (p.169). The final lines are devoted to moving from past and present to the future of language assessment and alternative and promising means of assessing and monitoring learning which will put the premium on the social rather than individual aspects of discourse.

All in all, Green's clear and practical treatment of common assessment issues in language education offers a succinct introductory textbook for the practitioners in the field. These issues have been deeply taken into account not as concepts only but also, whenever possible, a bridge is made to move from theory to practice. The book seems to be more suited to undergraduates and to those needing introductory information on assessment; these introductory issues setting the basis of assessment occupy a considerable space in the chapters. For those having more academic experience, though, the book can serve as a means of surveying and organizing existing knowledge. This, in turn, had led to a possible shortcoming that issues currently in vogue – such as DIF, bias, assessment argument, etc. which could have enjoyed chapters of their own – have been touched in passing only.

## References

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