

REVISITING THE ASSESSMENT OF SECOND LANGUAGE ABILITIES: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Aygun Rasulova

Hidri, S. (Ed.). (2018). *Revisiting the Assessment of Second Language Abilities: From Theory to Practice.* Springer.

The volume under review, *Revisiting the Assessment of Second Language Abilities: From Theory to Practice*, edited by Sahbi Hidri, is concerned with the assessment of second language abilities and the significance of preserving test fairness and equity when measuring such constructs. The book is organized into eight parts made up of 24 chapters. In keeping with the focus on the needs of practitioners, the chapters are organized around key practical topics. While six parts of the volume delve into the assessment of second language abilities, the other two parts home in on alternative forms of assessment (Part 8) and assessment literacy and fairness (Part 6).

Chapter 1 is an introduction in which the editor briefly introduces different paradigms regarding the assessment of language abilities as viewed from different angles by different scholars.

Part 1, entitled *Assessing Speaking*, elaborates on the necessities of revised assessment reforms and the procedures implementing them in the assessment of speaking. In Chapter 2, Hidri proposes to formulate productive speaking exams to handle the test-takers' shortcomings in the assessment of speaking. In assessing speaking in the Turkish context (Chapter 3), O'Grady introduces techniques of enhancing intra-rater and inter-rater consistency for a university entrance exam. Ballilah and Archibald (Chapter 4) adopt an "epidemiological approach" to examine Arabic language measures sensitive to developmental change among school-aged children. With concerns about the absence of a speaking assessment instrument, in Chapter 5, Rashidi calls to design a formative assessment tool for an in-service speaking course.

While assessment and feedback tend to be treated separately in L2 writing literature, Part 2, *Assessing Writing*, brings together these two essential topics as interconnected components of classroom assessment. The notion of feedback is addressed in Chapter 6, where White concludes that students' essay drafts improved notably from the first to the final draft due to the teacher's feedback provided to them. In Chapter 7, Mejri probes teachers' perceptions of test construct in the designing and rating of academic writing tests.

Part 3, *Assessing English for Specific Purposes (ESP)*, comprises Chapters 8 and 9. The former provides readers with different approaches to defining ESP and the relationship between ESP and needs analysis (NA). Elsaid Mohammed highlights the academic writing needs of Sudanese postgraduate students who experience difficulties in their thesis writing. In the latter (Chapter 9), Naimi seeks teachers' perceptions of assessment and the notion of washback in an ESP context.

Despite their irrevocable importance in language assessment and evaluation, assessing translation and literature has been a neglected area for different social, educational, and practical reasons. Part 4, *Assessing Translation and Literature*, opens with

Chapter 10, where Kavytska and Kvasova examine assessing textual competence (TC) in translation from Ukrainian into English. Qutub (Chapter 11) talks about applying innovative approaches to tackle the hindrances of comprehending literary texts among EFL students in Saudi Arabia.

Part 5 is devoted to assessing vocabulary, reading, and grammar, respectively. By employing an experiment, Sabbah (Chapter 12) finds out that guessing the meaning of words from a context is a more useful vocabulary learning strategy than using a monolingual dictionary. Chapter 13 is valuable in investigating the essential criteria for test construction: reliability and construct validity. Mattoussi studies reading comprehension test usefulness (authenticity, reliability, impact, interactiveness, validity, and practicality) among university students in Tunisia. Riahi (Chapter 14) explores EFL teachers' techniques in teaching and testing vocabulary at Tunisian secondary schools. Chapter 15 by Chniti discloses the importance of students' and teachers' perceptions of test specifications in teaching and testing the construct of grammar in a Tunisian context.

Part 6, *Assessment Literacy and Test Fairness*, involves case studies from Russia, Ukraine, Iran, and Kurdistan. Popkova (Chapter 16) emphasizes the efficiency and reliability of continuous cumulative assessment in L2 teaching. Ukrayinska (Chapter 17) introduces a course that contributes to evaluating student teachers' classroom assessment literacy. The debate about whether test fairness subsumes validity or whether it is an aspect of validity is far from resolved. In Chapter 18, Razavipour argues against the view that test validity would necessarily ensure test fairness in the university admission exams in Iran. In Chapter 19, Ismael examines to what extent EFL students are unable to conduct alternative assessments (portfolios, self-assessment, peer-assessment, etc.) appropriately.

Part 7, *Standard Exams and Test-Taking Strategies*, describes two case studies addressing some challenges related to students' exam performance and test-taking strategies. Liubashenko and Yashenkova (Chapter 19) assert the necessity of extending the scope of the English exit exam taken annually by BA students in Ukraine. The washback effect refers to the impact of testing on teaching and learning, which has either positive or negative results. The study conducted by Papakammenou (Chapter 20) focuses on exploring the nature and scope of exam preparation classes and their washback effect on teachers' teaching practices.

In Part 8, *Alternative Forms of Assessment*, the authors address performance-based assessment, dynamic assessment (DA), and formal assessment in Algeria, Egypt, and KSA. Djoub (Chapter 21) evaluates the washback effect of performance-based assessment and its impact on MA students' learning. In Chapter 22, Ibrahim uses dynamic assessment (DA) as a tool to detect areas of inert knowledge in the acquisition of EFL grammar. In the last chapter of the book, Rosheen and Afsheen study the choice and frequency of language learning strategies (LLSs) employed by Saudi EFL learners in the Foundation year program.

The volume contributes to the broad perspectives on the assessment of L2 abilities, and to answering the question of how these perspectives can be reconciled effectively and appropriately in today's multilingual context. Describing the on-going changes in the curriculum and their impact on the foreign language assessments is

another merit of the book, informing readers about the latest assessment reforms. The numerous examples of assessment instruments represented throughout the chapters, the diverse cultural backgrounds of the learners, and the application of multiple theories related to the construct of language ability increase the usefulness of the book for L2 researchers and practitioners.

Although the collection makes a valuable contribution to the assessment of language abilities, some issues remain to be tackled. It is worth noting that the vast majority of the studies were carried out in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where the lack of assessment literacy amongst English language teachers is a significant concern. Additionally, it would be more reader-friendly if the publisher avoided the disarrangement of chapters (pp. 11–15) in the introduction, which does not match the table of contents.

Aygun Rasulova | School of Foreign Languages, Shanghai Jiao Tong University,
Shanghai, P.R. China
<aygunsjtu@gmail.com>