

外文系海外专家学者讲座

Speaker:

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Lecture 1: Justifying the uses of language assessments: linking test performance to consequences

Venue: 116, Wennan Building, Tsinghua University

Time: 9:00-11:00 am, Thursday (Oct. 10)

Abstract:

We generally give a language assessment because we need to make some decisions. In language programs, we use assessments for selecting students for admission, placing them at appropriate levels for instructional purposes, assessing their progress and achievement in the program, or assigning grades. Language assessments are also used for making decisions about hiring or promoting individuals in companies, for certifying professionals, and for immigration and naturalization. *All* of these decisions will have consequences for stakeholders, and many of these decisions are high-stakes, entailing major consequences for stakeholders. We therefore need to be able to justify the decisions we make on the basis of test scores, so that we can be accountable to the stakeholders—the various individuals who will be affected in one way or another by the assessment and by the way we use the it.

In order to justify using the results of a language assessment for making decisions, we need to provide a rationale for linking students' performance on the assessment with the intended uses—the decisions that are made and the consequences of these. This rationale is provided by an **assessment use argument (AUA)**. By *demonstrating*, through argumentation and the collection of supporting evidence, that our assessment is useful for its intended purpose, we provide the justification we need to be accountable to the individuals who are affected by the assessment and the way it is used.

Lecture 2: How do different uses and different language frameworks impact language assessment practice?

Venue: 116, Wennan Building, Tsinghua University

Time: 4:00-6:00 pm, Friday (Oct. 11)

Abstract:

The use for which an assessment is intended is generally regarded as the most important consideration in its design and development. Similarly, defining the construct (the area, component, or aspect of language ability) we want to measure is widely considered to be a critical decision in the process of developing a language assessment. In practice, language assessments are used for a wide range of uses, or decisions, and historically, test developers have drawn on a variety of theoretical frameworks of language to define the construct to be measured.

For any *particular* test, but especially for large-scale, high-stakes tests, the test developers and test users are required, by current professional standards, to provide evidence to support their claims about the intended interpretations of test scores and about the intended uses of these interpretations to make decisions. However, in an increasingly global “market” of language testing, there is increasing pressure, on both test developers and test users, to find ways of “linking” different tests to a common conceptual framework of language use. What is at issue is that these tests may have been developed for very different uses, for different populations of test takers, and may be informed by very different views of the construct to be measured. In this environment, the demand for portability and transferability of interpretations often overrides fundamental concerns for reliability, validity, and fairness.

The primary purpose of “linking” different tests to each other or to a common standard is to enable test users to interpret and *use* the results of the two tests in the same way. Using two tests “in the same way” requires that the two tests measure similar constructs, that the decisions to be made are similar, and that the consequences of these decisions are similar. In my view, many current linking activities do not provide adequate justification for claims about these basic similarities. Given the pervasiveness of such claims and practice, I think it is imperative for us, as a profession, to address some very fundamental issues about the nature and justification of “linking” different language tests to a common standard.

In this presentation I will begin with a brief overview of the different language frameworks that have informed large-scale language tests in the past half century. I will then use an assessment use argument (Bachman & Palmer, 2010) to analyze the ways in which two different approaches to defining language differ in terms of the claims they make about score-based interpretations. I will then discuss the different uses for which tests based on these two ways of defining language might be most appropriate. Finally, I will return to the issue of the difficulty of “linking” tests based on different types of language frameworks and intended for different kinds of decisions to a common framework of language.

Reference

Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (2010). *Language assessment in practice: Developing language assessments and justifying their use in the real world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Short Biographical Sketch:

Lyle F. Bachman is Professor Emeritus of Applied Linguistics at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is a Past President of the American Association for Applied

Linguistics and of the International Language Testing Association. In 1998 he won the TESOL/Newbury House Award for Outstanding Research, has twice (1991 and 1997) won the Modern Language Association of America's Kenneth Mildenerger Award for outstanding research publication, and in 2012 won the Sage/International Language Testing Association award for the best book published in language testing. In 2004 he was given a Lifetime Achievement Award by the International Language Testing Association, and in 2010 he received the Distinguished Scholarship and Service Award from the American Association for Applied Linguistics. He has published numerous articles and books in language testing and other areas of Applied Linguistics.

Prof. Bachman teaches courses and conducts practitioner training workshops in language assessment and serves as a consultant in research projects in language testing and in developing language assessments for universities and government agencies around the world. His current research interests include validation theory, classroom assessment, standards and linking in assessment, and epistemological issues in Applied Linguistics research.