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Two Intervierws on Language Testing: An Introduction

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The following section contains interviews with noted language testing experts Charles Alderson and Dorry Kenyon, whom we had the chance to interview during the Fourth Annual Southern California Association for Language Assessment Research (SCALAR) Conference held in Los Angeles on May 11-12, 2001. The theme of the conference was "Foreign Language Assessment at School and College Levels," an area in which both Alderson and Kenyon have much experience and insight. They provide complementary perspectives on issues in language testing because of their varied backgrounds, research interests, and the different test development and research projects with which they have been involved.

Alderson, an applied linguist by training, is a professor of applied linguistics at Lancaster University. He has done a great deal of work on both theoretical and practical aspects of language testing and applied linguistics research, primarily in Europe and the British Commonwealth. His work includes research on language test design methodology, test validation, and the assessment of reading. He is Scientific Coordinator ofa Web-based diagnostic language testing system (DIALANG), sponsored by the European Union and conducted in 14 different languages.

Kenyon, on the other hand, was trained as a quantitative methodologist who has always strived to apply these methodologies to testing language. Rather than pursuing a career in academia, he works as a researcher and test developer at a nonprofit research center, The Center for Applied Linguistics, in Washington, DC. He has done a great deal of work developing tape-mediated Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI) and computer-mediated Computer Based Oral Proficiency (COPI) versions of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL OPI), the primary tool for assessing foreign language speaking proficiency in the United States. He is also currently working on the development of the new foreign language section of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), sometimes referred to as the "nation's report card," as well as on developing web-based proficiency tests of less-commonly taught languages.

Because of the range of perspectives they provide, these two interviews together yield valuable insights into a number of concerns central to language testing and research today. We are grateful to Dr. Alderson and Dr. Kenyon for agreeing to talk with us about their ideas and experience.

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