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Language Testing by Tim McNamara. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, xv+140 pp.

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Language testing has evolved over the past 40 years with fresh approaches, innovative methods, and social policy all contributing to its growth. Though these issues are fundamental to the language tester or researcher, many teachers, school administrators, and graduate students not focusing on language assessment have not been exposed to this evolution; very few books cater to the novice tester. Published works have continued to become denser and more technical, often requiring background knowledge beyond those with only a budding interest in the field. In *Language Testing*, Tim McNamara makes the field of language assessment accessible to the untrained reader through logical explanations and a clear organization in a comprehensive, albeit basic, overview of language testing.

Language Testing is part of a seven-book introductory series on language study from Oxford University Press, all of which are organized in four sections: Survey, Readings, References, and Glossary. The Survey, presented in eight chapters, represents the main body of the book. It provides the reader with a comprehensive overview of all major concepts in language testing, including test design, rating procedures, validity, types of measurement, and the social implications associated with assessment. McNamara provides theories from influential literature on language testing, including the works of Robert Lado, John Oller, Dell Hymes, and Lyle Bachman and Adrian Palmer, among many others. He also outlines directions for future research as well as dilemmas within the field.

Chapter 1, entitled "Testing, testing... What is a language test?," provides an opening for this introductory book. Although a bit redundant, the introduction helps to orient the reader and demonstrates the boundaries of the book's content. In this chapter, McNamara appeals to the sensibilities of those *using* tests (or the information they provide) in addition to the test creation experts. He provides useful, familiar, and accessible examples of testing concepts and specific terms in boldface type. Readers may access concise definitions of these terms in the Glossary near the end of the book.

Chapter 2, "Communication and the design of language tests," involves an introduction to communication and its relationship to test design. McNamara brings to attention such terms as *test construct*, *discrete point testing*, *integrative and pragmatic tests*, *cloze test*, and *job analysis*. All of these concepts are carefully framed by the contributions of influential language testing researchers from a historical perspective. McNamara traces the response of the field of language testing

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from Lado's skills testing approach to a need for integrative tests and later to pragmatic tests. He briefly introduces some early theories of communicative competence, followed by a discussion of more recent developments in communicative language tests and models of communicative ability.

Chapter 3, "The testing cycle," includes an interesting description of test content and method and provides a cursory introduction to authenticity, response formats, and test specifications. In his discussion, McNamara presents the reader with a basic explanation of the design stage, the construction stage, and the try-out stage. By means of a skillful overview, McNamara manages to capture the essence and evolution of the test design process.

In Chapter 4, "The rating process," McNamara inclusively outlines criteria for rater-mediated assessment. He discusses intricacies and inconsistencies associated with the rating process and includes methods researchers have developed to combat these difficulties. The section dealing with rating scales is perhaps the most useful for the untrained reader; McNamara provides unambiguous explanations for both holistic and analytic rating scales and includes a sample rating scale for exemplification. In alluding to the importance of rating scales and consistency as central to any testing procedure, McNamara prepares the reader for the treatment of test validation in the next chapter.

In Chapter 5, "Validity: Testing the test," McNamara discusses the significance of validation with the same depth as any more advanced text, so the novice reader will understand the importance of validity to the same degree as would any experienced tester. McNamara describes face validity as well as content validity and addresses threats to validity, referring back to test content, test method, and test construct in his previous discussions. He also briefly treats consequential validity (how the implementation of a test may affect the integrity of inferences made about the test-takers), calling into question the social impact of tests.

Chapter 6, "Measurement," contextualizes dense concepts and technical terms from a traditional yet enlightened perspective. Although McNamara uses terms such as *norm-referenced* and *criterion-referenced* measurement, *reliability coefficient*, *normal distribution*, and *item discrimination*, he avoids the use of highly scientific language in his explanations of these concepts. He also discusses tools used to analyze test performance, including Item Response Theory and Rasch Measurement, and touches on more recent developments in computer adaptive testing.

In Chapter 7, "The social character of language tests," McNamara addresses assessment as it relates to social and educational policy, accountability, washback, and test impact. McNamara stresses the responsibility of the testing community in developing fair and ethical tests and presents an informed perspective on the more radical field of critical language testing, which advocates the entire reconstruction of testing due to its relationship to socio-political power.

Chapter 8, "New directions—and dilemmas?," outlines the role of technology in language testing, including the difficulties encountered by those participat-

ing in all aspects of assessment. He provides an overview of computer based testing (CBT) and semi-direct tests of speaking, including issues of validity, authenticity, and responsibility surrounding this new technology. McNamara asserts that "a language test is only as good as the theory of language upon which it is based" (p. 86) and suggests looking to the nature of language and communication to address test vulnerabilities.

The eight-chapter Survey gives the novice reader a helpful foundation; however, a more experienced reader may find this section elementary. Although the introduction in Chapter 1 gives the illusion of adequate topic coverage, some of the explanations, though clear, are too simplistic; the novice reader comes away with a perspective on language testing that is deficient in some compulsory details. Much of the superficial treatment of information contained in the introduction could have been absorbed into the seven more detailed chapters that follow in the Survey. While the chapter content is necessary for the untrained reader, perhaps most useful to the advanced reader are the chapter conclusions, which provide an accurate, succinct, and complete representation of the content coverage.

After the Survey, the second section of the book, Readings, provides additional texts for those readers interested in pursuing in greater detail any of the chapter topics covered in the Survey section. McNamara lists seminal texts according to their corresponding Survey chapter and includes a short summary and questions designed to "give readers an initial familiarity with the more specialist idiom of the linguistics literature, where the issue might not be so readily accessible, and to encourage them into close critical reading" (p. xiii). This section aids in reinforcing the Survey content for the novice reader and requires thoughtful pondering from the more advanced reader seeking comparisons across texts and within issues. Though perhaps the most useful section of the book, the short summaries in the Readings section should not be used as a substitute for reading these primary sources in their entirety.

The third section, References, includes a selection of books and articles for further reading. This annotated list of references includes a tertiary categorization system indicating the level of reading for the interested reader. Novice readers may choose to broaden their knowledge base with other introductory texts, graduate students of assessment can challenge themselves with more advanced or technical reading, and the language testing expert may choose highly specialized and demanding reading. McNamara presents this section as useful for all levels of study in language testing by choosing books of varying levels in almost all topic areas. In this effective reference section, readers will find the longer annotations concise and informative.

The Glossary is the final section of the book and contains definitions of the boldfaced terms from the Survey section. While the terms are fairly well defined, they are cross referenced only with their location in the Survey introduction, where their explanations are basic and decontextualized. Although these definitions may prove helpful to the untrained reader, a more advanced investigator will not find

the Glossary particularly useful. The elaborated, detailed, and contextualized descriptions of the integral terms contained in the Survey chapters will be of interest to all readers, especially more advanced ones. It would have been helpful if the author had included an additional index referencing these terms in the Survey section for those looking for more than a minimal definition.

Despite some of the inherent difficulties traditionally associated with producing an introductory text that is both inclusive and comprehensible, *Language Testing* represents an extremely accessible overview in the abstract and technical field of language assessment. McNamara's introductory perspective captures the fundamental concepts of language testing for the novice reader and provides a comprehensive reference text for the more advanced reader. The Readings section is indispensable for the language assessment learner, and the References section is a valuable contribution for anyone interested in pursuing the field of language testing in any capacity. Although this text is not meant for intensive study, it is a springboard for further study or research. *Language Testing* is an elemental introduction to assessment and should be a part of the library of every individual interested in the field.