



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM  
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA



## **International symposium Grenoble, 24-26 October 2019**

### ***Evaluation and Language Acquisition: From Formative Assessment to Certification Exams***

#### **Call for Papers**

Since the birth of testing and evaluation as a scientific discipline in the 1950s, the prevailing trends in the teaching of language and culture have always been reflected in the forms that language assessment has taken. Discrete-point testing (Lado, 1961) was inspired by the structuralist approach to linguistics and behaviorism in psychology and cognitive sciences. Then, communicative language testing (Morrow, 1979) put forward the textual unity of written and oral texts, as well as the ability to convey an understandable message beyond its formal acceptability and the assessment of reception and productive skills. In the last few decades, the scientific community has focused on new important key concepts, such as situational and interactional authenticity in task-based testing, learning oriented assessment, evaluation for diagnostic purposes, just to mention a few (Hamp-Lyons, 2016). Today, candidates are increasingly presenting plurilingual language profiles, are or will resort to international mobility, and are more and more competent in the area of information and communication technology (ICT), regardless of the formative and evaluative context of education (schools, universities, certification centers, language centers, languages for specialists in other disciplines centers, etc.). At the same time, the dissemination of tests and certifications, which often have a strong impact on the lives of candidates and even institutions, has led to a greater awareness of the need to design valid, reliable, and fair language assessments.

#### **Axis 1: Validity applied to language assessment: Theoretical reflections and/or feedback on experience.**

The presentations corresponding to axis 1 will question the relations between the various types of evaluation systems (diagnostic testing, placement, certification), their role in the language acquisition process, and their impact (low or high stake) on the stakeholders (e.g., students/candidates, teachers/examiners, and institutions).

On the one hand, we will consider the design and validation of tests in relation to the construct and in relation to the impact on the actors. On the other hand, we will reflect on the choices to be made in order to respect the principles of utility and equity in testing. Since the early 1980s ethical questions have aroused the interest of the scientific community. Spolsky (1981) in particular, warned researchers against the negative consequences that high stakes language tests might have on individuals and claimed that language tests, like drugs, should bear the mention “use with care”. According to Kunnan (2000), five aspects of language evaluation must be taken into account to respect the principle of equity: validity, absence of bias, accessibility, administration and social consequences. “In terms of justice, [...] the question that should be discussed is whether the test will generally do good to society” (ibidem, 7).

Whether they deal with theory or experience feedback, proposals should focus on plurilingual contexts and on the possible impact of the Companion Volume with New Descriptors (CEFR) on evaluation and testing:

- What is the added value of a validation process in language testing?
- How can we develop a synergy between diagnostic formative assessment and certification exams?
- How can we relate validity, utility and ethics in evaluation processes?

## **Axis 2: Evaluation of inter-comprehensive and plurilingual approaches.**

Over the last twenty years, inter-comprehensive and plurilingual approaches have proven to be of great interest both in terms of research and of pedagogical activity. They contribute to explore and question in depth a dimension of language that appears quite spontaneously in an ecological environment but is still insufficiently exploited in institutional settings. The didactic schemes that have been developed and operationalized over the years by a world-wide academic community rely on the initial assumption that a speaker placed in an inter-comprehensive situation (IC) draws inferences based on prior linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge. This knowledge is fed, supported, expanded and formalised on a formative level so as to enrich sustainably and continuously the individual linguistic repertoire by successive positive transfers. Such schemes have long proven their efficiency among various stakeholders (from Primary to Higher education, in regular curricula and/or continuing education). Nevertheless, in order to promote such approaches in institutional settings, it is now indispensable to evaluate and certify the competences that those formative plurilingual programmes have strived to develop.

Proposals, expressed in the form of theoretical deepening or experience feedback, may be inspired by the following questions:

- Evaluating Inter-comprehensive competence (IC): what construct, measurement tools, validity evidence?

- Evaluating capacities in interaction and reception in related languages: what is the State of the Art?
- Evaluating capacities in IC: what impact does it have on “traditional” evaluation?

### **Third axis: Evaluation and language interaction**

The development of interactionist and socio-cultural theories (Lantolf, 2000) and the publication of the CEFR (2001) have made the notion of communicative competence evolve towards the notion of oral interaction (Kramsch 1986, Pekarek Doehler 2006 , Hellermann 2009). More recently, the Companion Volume with New Descriptors (2017) has not only reasserted the importance of oral interaction in everyday life, but also the growing importance of written interaction, already analyzed in earlier research work (Vion, 1999). Many studies (e.g., Bakhtin 1984, Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1990 1992 1994, Rouveyrol et al., 2005, Sandlund, Sundqvist & Nyroos 2016, Lazaraton & Davies 2008, Mannoilov 2017, inter alia) present the notion of interaction as a co-construction. For instance Bakhtin puts forward the concept of "active responsive attitude" to describe the intersubjective relationship that a speaker and a co-speaker develop in a dialogue.

Within the institutional framework of language teaching and learning, conceiving interaction in terms of assessment raises a number of issues more particularly related to the co-construction process. What criteria should be used to assess interaction in general? How is it possible to assess a language activity that is not constructed individually? What kind of bias are student to student *vs* teacher to student interactions likely to introduce (Mannoilov, 2017) in an assessment that claims to be valid? It is now well established that nonverbal modalities (kinesic and proxemic) account for more than half of the communication (Mehrabian, 1971; Birdwhistell 1970, 1981). Should the nonverbal component be taken into account when assessing interaction, and if so, what scoring criteria should be used?

We will, therefore, consider:

- The role and the importance that should be given to oral and written interaction in assessments, especially in language certification
- The scoring criteria to be used to assess interaction
- The role of verbal and non-verbal modalities in the assessment of interaction
- The biases inherent in oral interaction and possible solutions for addressing the requirements of validity, reliability and fairness in oral assessments.

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