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***Iranian Journal
of
Language Teaching Research
(Book Review)***



***Talking about Language Assessment: The LAQ Interviews*, Edited by Antony John Kunnan. Routledge, New York and London (2015). ix+261., ISBN: 978-1-138-78552-6.**

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Talking about Language Assessment is the first book of its kind in that it follows an interview-based approach with a narrative/discursive style to the history of language assessment. The edited volume comes under Routledge *New Perspectives in Language Assessment* Series (jointly edited by Antony Kunnan and James Purpura) and includes interviews originally published in *Language Assessment Quarterly* (LAQ) from 2004 to 2014. The interviews were conducted with 12 distinguished figures on language assessment and second language acquisition who are, also, prolific researchers with influential contributions to the field: John Carroll, Merrill Swain, Alain Davis, John Trim, Bernard Spolsky, Kenji Ohtomo, Charles Stanfield, Elana Shohamy, Gui Shichun, Lyle Bachman, Charles Alderson, and Liz Hamp-Lyons. "The volume allows readers to see each interviewee's language assessment story as the interviewees reveal what they were thinking at the time and what led them to investigate the intellectual questions addressed in their work" (pp. viii-ix). The book is intended as a useful resource for undergraduate and post graduate students in applied linguistics as well as researchers working on language assessment.

In addition to a Series Editor Preface, the book consists of an Introduction, twelve chapters, and an Index. The chapters follow more or less the same structure: background information such as the names of the interviewee/s and the interviewer/s, the place and, in some chapters, the date of the interview, the interview channel (on the phone, face to face, via email), the duration of the interview, the interview transcript, an introduction to the interviewee's academic and social life, and notes. Some interview chapters are also appended with additional information such as: acknowledgments, references/resources, the interviewees' publications and updates where needed. In the Series Editor Preface, James Purpura provides a brief history of language assessment in foreign languages and in English as a Foreign Language.

Then, in Introduction, Antony John Kunnan and Nick Saville talk about various features of the collection in the form of conversation answering questions on the purpose and the focus of the

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 10.30466/ijltr.2016.20381

interviews, the way they were conducted, how the interviewees were selected and the like. The aim of the collection, according to the editor and associate editor of LAQ was to identify key figures in the field as to the criteria they used to select the interviewees and interviewers, they state, "we were concerned to get a range of voices from different parts of the world, representing varied perspectives on the topics of interest, and of course, with a balance of gender" (p. xii). The format used for the interview was 'shooting script' to create a naturally flowing dialogue. "The interview transcripts provide reflections on the state of the art in our field as perceived by some of the most influential figures" (p. xiii). The editor is to be commended for his innovation in using interviews to survey the history of, and developments in, language testing since as Harwood, Austin, and Macaulay (2009) and Mason (2002) point out, the interview is considered as a perfect tool for eliciting interviewees' perception, viewpoints, knowledge, experiences, and justifications for their practices.

Chapter 1, *The Story behind the Modern Language Aptitude Test*, reports an interview with John B. Carroll (1916-2003). Carroll, as an outstanding premier psychologist with a considerable rate of studies, is the figure who is best known for the development of the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT). In a part of the interview, Carroll relates most of his achievements to chance and talks about John Gardner's influential role in his academic life.

Chapter 2, *Biasing the Best in Language Testing and Learning*, narrates an interview with Merrill Swain. Through this chapter, Swain talks about Canal and Swain model, communicative performance and the importance of context, output hypothesis, collaborative tasks for language assessment, bias for best, role of feedback in learning, etc. In her view, to make a useful test/research task, one should be aware of what is to be assessed and what is to be learned.

Chapter 3, *40 Years in Applied Linguistics*, is an interview with Alain Davis. In this chapter, Davis shares details of his work in Africa and the development of Davies Test, the Bangalore Project, his involvement in the British Council, the origins of IELTS, etc.

Chapter 4, *At 80*, reports an interview with John Trim (1924-2013). Trim's Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), first presented in Strasbourg in April 1997, has had a great impact on language testing. In the interview, he explains how he managed to climb the career ladder. Also, he talks about his English descriptions (Waystage, Threshold), CEFR and its various aspects.

Chapter 5, *People and Events in Language Testing: A Sort of Memoir*, is an interview with Bernard Spolsky, at the Language Testing Research Colloquium in Ottawa. The conversation is primarily an account of Spolsky's views on various issues as cloze test, Educational Testing Service (ETS), TOEFL, writing test, measured words, Navajo language maintenance, and SAT.

Chapter 6, *The Founding Father of Language Testing in Japan*, narrates Kenji Ohtomo's life. Through his friendly and intimate stance with a sense of humor, Professor Ohtomo talks about English Language Education Council, Item Response Theory, Classical Test Theory, etc., pointing out to the need for training more language test specialists.

Chapter 7, *A life in Language Testing*, is the transcript of an interview with Charles Stansfield. Dr. Stansfield, as a prominent figure in contemporary language testing, reflects on his role at ETS, TOEFL Research Coordinator, SPEAK, SLEP, CAL, MLAT, SLTI, and some other projects he was engaged in.

Chapter 8, *From Cloze to Consequences and Beyond*, recounts an interview with Elana Shohamy who discusses her role as one of the influential members in creating Hebrew assessment criteria. Then,

she shares her views regarding dynamic assessment, gender and testing, her productive work with Spolsky, some of her books, her hobbies, and some other interesting topics.

Chapter 9, *The Founding Father of Language Testing in China*, is devoted to an interview with Gui Shichuan. Shichuan describes his first nationwide English Proficiency Test, large-scale tests such as CET4 and 6, and some other projects in China.

Chapter 10, *Language Assessment: Its Development and Future*, presents Lyle F. Bachman's views on the tests he developed with Palmer, and Oller. Bachman shares his viewpoints on the latter's unitary competence, provides further information on two of his seminal books (*Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing*, *Language Testing in Practice*), and elucidates on Assessment Use Argument, validity, Messick's unitary framework, etc.

Chapter 11, *A Lifetime of Language Testing*, is interview transcripts with J. Charles Alderson. where Alderson provides more information about *A Lifetime in Language Testing*, cloze test, his studies at Lancaster University, his interest in reading and its relationship with (diagnostic) testing, methodological issues, washback research, and some the like.

Chapter 12, *The Accidental Language Tester*, is the life history of Liz Hamp-Lyons. Hamp-Lyons reflects on her early life, and talks about her *Assessing Second Language Writing in Academic Contexts*, ultra-large-scale testing, etc. She winds up the interview with some valuable advice for women in how they can cope with their academic and family responsibilities.

All in all, the book provides in-depth and comprehensive information on some of the most prominent language testing experts across the world in a highly contextualized manner. After reading this book, the reader will know almost everything about these prolific researchers; form their family, social, academic, religious to political life; i.e., their life histories. The book is the voice of life that the reader can easily connect to it while getting to know the outstanding figures of the realm of assessment, communicated to the reader in a very simple and reader-friendly language. This book is a collection of real life stories (with its ups and downs) with real characters. With no exaggeration, while reading this book, the reader feels s/he is watching a very interesting movie wishing to watch it once more.

The appropriate prompts used by the interviewers to direct the interviews in similar routes are very valuable. Also, while following the same route throughout the interviews, each interviewer demonstrates a particular view in conducting the interview. Although these interviews have been published in LAQ through the years, having all of them in one collection is a bonus for interested readers. Furthermore, photos of interviewees (some of whom are now themselves established researchers in the field) and interviewers help the reader to connect to the book more vividly. To sum up, the readers would be thankful to *Language Assessment Quarterly* to publish such valuable interviews; also the editors of the book are to be commended for having taken the initiative to collect them in one place.

References

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