

## The Teacher's Role in Classroom-based Language Assessment

Yuna Seong

*Teachers College, Columbia University*

Different from large-scale language tests aiming to measure general proficiency and often administered in specific highly-controlled test settings, classroom-based language assessment is embedded in the teaching and learning cycle of a classroom and has multiple “identities” (Rea-Dickins, 2001, p. 451) due to its wide range of uses or purposes. Classroom-based language assessment is an integral part of language instruction where the teachers, as “agents” (Rea-Dickins, 2004), are the ones responsible for facilitating student learning and obtaining information about their progress and achievement, hence, also earning the name *teacher assessment*. From *planning* what to assess and how, through *implementing* assessment procedures and *monitoring* students’ performances to *recording* students’ attainment and progress, the teacher is constantly making decisions on how to keep track of students’ progress and attainment (Rea-Dickins, 2001). Either accomplished through a formal assessment procedure or through informal daily monitoring and observation, the teacher’s knowledge of the students guides him/her to make subsequent pedagogical decisions and push learning further.

The implementation and use of classroom-based language assessment vary greatly in form and procedure (Cheng, Rogers, & Hu, 2004; Cheng & Wang, 2007), and studies have contributed to the understanding of the underlying factors and processes that impact the thinking and decision-making in assessment practices on the part of the teachers (e.g., Arkoudis & O’Loughlin, 2004; Cheng et al., 2004; Yin, 2010). One recent case in point is that of Yin’s (2010). The study presents a more detailed understanding of teachers’ underlying thinking processes, which Yin refers to as “assessment cognitions.” It was found that teachers’ *strategic cognitions* (e.g., teachers’ beliefs in language learning and their understanding of learning goals) and *interactive cognitions* (e.g., teachers’ preconceived ideas regarding students and their prediction of the students’ performance in the target language use domain) influenced both their approach to planning assessment procedures and the actual implementation of assessment practices.

Assessment “capacity” or “competence” has also been identified as a factor that affects teachers’ assessment practices (Chang, Rogers, & Hu, 2004), and the importance of language teachers’ professional training and development in assessment has been raised (Bachman, 2000; Brindley, 1998; Edelenbos & Kubanek-German, 2004). In mainstream education, Brookhart (2011) proposes a set of knowledge and skills that teachers need to be aware of. In particular, Brookhart emphasizes the importance of the ability to understand the “learning progression” in the corresponding content area. This “allows teachers to identify where a student is located in reference to a learning intention [and] helps teachers interpret students’ work, focus feedback, and plan steps in instruction and assessment, while moving the student towards the goal” (Brookhart, 2011, p. 7). This also relates to Rea-Dickins’ (2008) point of view that language teachers should have a firm understanding and awareness of both language and the developmental processes involved in language acquisition. Given that general educational assessment knowledge and skills are documented (Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students, 1990), it would be largely helpful if guidelines necessary

for teacher competence pertaining to language teaching were available. Edelenbos and Kubanek-German (2004) have, to a certain extent, begun the process by presenting a set of descriptors as the basis for identifying teachers' skills in assessing their students; however, it is relatively narrow.

Ways in which classroom-based language assessment is used and the involved processes are heavily influenced by the practices of the teachers. This review has attempted to briefly introduce some of the issues relating to teacher-based judgments and decision-making as well as the importance of establishing a better understanding of teacher competence. Continued interest in the array of research that seeks to further identify and depict teachers' cognition and competence, as well as factors that influence their decisions when using assessment in the classroom, is anticipated.

## REFERENCES

- Arkoudis, S., & O'Loughlin, K. (2004). *Outcomes anxiety: ESL teachers assessing newly arrived ESL learners*, *Language Testing*, 21(3), 283-303.
- Bachman, L. (2000). Modern language testing at the turn of the century: Assuring that what we count counts, *Language Testing*, 17(1), 1-42.
- Brookhart, S. (2011). Educational Assessment Knowledge and Skills for Teachers. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 30, 3-12.
- Brindley, G. (1998). Outcomes-based assessment and reporting in language programs: A review of the issues, *Language Testing*, 15(3), 45-85.
- Cheng, L., Rogers, T., & Hu, H. (2004). ESL/EFL instructors' classroom assessment practices: purposes, methods, and procedures. *Language Testing*, 21(3), 360-389.
- Cheng, L. & Wang, X. (2007). Grading, feedback, and reporting in ESL/EFL classrooms. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 4, 85-107.
- Davison, C. (2004). The contradictory culture of teacher-based assessment: ESL assessment practices in Australian and Hong Kong, *Language Testing*, 21(3), 305-334.
- Edelenbo, P., & Kubanek-German, A. (2004). Teacher assessment: the concept of diagnostic competence. *Language Testing*, 21, 259-283.
- Rea-Dickins, P. (2001). Mirror, mirror on the wall: identifying processes of classroom assessment. *Language Testing*, 18, 429-462.
- Rea-Dickins, P. (2004). Understanding teachers as agents of assessment. *Language Testing*, 21(3), 249-258.
- Rea-Dickins, P. (2008). Classroom-based language assessment. In E. Shohamy & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education, 2nd Edition, Volume 7: Language Testing and Assessment*, (pp. 257-271). Heidelberg, Germany: Springer.
- Scott, C., & Erduran S. (2004) Learning from international frameworks for assessment: EAL descriptors in Australia and the USA. *Language Testing*, 21(3), 409-431.
- Standards for teacher competence in educational assessments of students 1990: Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers, National Council on Measurement in Education, and National Educational Association. Retrieved March, 2011 online at: <http://www.unl.edu/buros/bimm/html/article3.html>
- Yin, M. (2010). Understanding classroom language assessment through teacher thinking research. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 7(2), 175-194.

Yuna Seong is a doctoral student in TESOL at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her research interests include language assessment (testing speaking in particular) and language teaching. She is currently teaching ESL at the American Language Institute, New York University, and is working as a testing coordinator in the Community English Program at Teachers College, Columbia University.