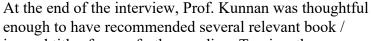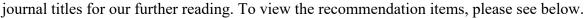# An Interview with Professor Antony Kunnan

Drew Fagan and Adrienne Wai Man Lew

The Web Journal Editorial Board (represented by Drew Fagan and Adrienne Wai Man Lew) had the pleasure to meet with Professor Antony Kunnan, the guest speaker of the 2010 APPLE Colloquium and Lecture, for a most in-depth discussion revolving his specialties: language testing.

Professor Kunnan is a prominent figure in language assessment. He has published widely in the field, most recently on the topic of test fairness and on assessment issues related to citizenship and immigration. Professor Kunnan is the editor of Language Assessment Quarterly, and a former President of the International Association of Language Testing.

At the end of the interview, Prof. Kunnan was thoughtful enough to have recommended several relevant book / journal titles for our further reading. To view the recommendation items, please see below.

We would like to thank Professor Kunnan for agreeing to speak with us amid his hectic schedule on the day of the Lecture. We would also like to thank Professor Jim Purpura and Catherine Box, Program Associate for Applied Linguistics, for coordinating the event. Last but not least, we would like to show our appreciation to our fellow Editorial Board member, Christos Theodoropulos, for his great ideas with regard to the interview questions.

Introduction

The full interview

## Questions (excerpts from the interview):

1. Following Messick's (1989) unified validity framework and its implications for language assessment (Bachman, 1990), what have been some of the advances in language assessment validation research? How do language assessment theoreticians conceptualize and understand "validity" today?

2. With regard to assessment validation research on test consequences, what has been the empirical focus thus far?

3. In Kunnan (2009), you have raised some important questions and pointed out several concerns over the US Naturalization Test. How did you get interested in and involved with this? Could you highlight some of the issues for us?

4. Is there anything that you would like to see improved in the current US Naturalization Test?

5. Just now you mentioned numerous issues with the current US Naturalization Test, and how you would like to see them improved. How practical is that – in light of all the variables you have just discussed?

6. In Kunnan and Jang (2009), you mentioned the importance of meaningful diagnostic feedback to language assessment, specifically. Before we move on, could you tell us what you mean by "diagnostic feedback"?

7. In Kunnan and Jang (2009), you recommended that a better understanding of language ability and language development be achieved, and that such an understanding be integrated in diagnostic feedback models. To what extent do you envisage a synergic relationship between language testing and second language acquisition? What should this relationship be like?

8. You mentioned the importance of bridging curriculum, instruction, and assessment for a more complete understanding of students' abilities and grasp of a language. As far as the interactive process of providing feedback, to what extent have the different subfields of applied linguistics, including discourse analysis, been incorporated in empirical research to arrive at such an understanding?

9. You have been involved with the pedagogy of statistics – here at TC we use your Statistical Analyses for Language Assessment Workbook (Bachman & Kunnan, 2005) to understand key statistical concepts as they relate to L2 testing. However, the emphasis on statistics seems to have led some graduate students, educators, and practitioners in applied linguistics to shy away from testing. What advice do you have for these different parties, especially in terms of making testing and statistical methods more accessible without glossing over important concepts?

## Titles Recommended by Prof. Kunnan

Extra G., Spotti, M., & van Avemaet, P. (2009) (Eds.) *Language testing, migration and citizenship.* London, UK: Continuum.

Shohamy, E., & McNamara, T. (2009) (Eds.) Language assessment for immigration, citizenship and asylum. Special issue. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 6, 1.

Spolsky, B. (2009) (Ed.) Language policy and language assessment. Special issue. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 29, 1.

## References

Bachman, L. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bachman, L. F, & Kunnan, A. J. (2005). *Statistical analysis for language assessment workbook.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kunnan, A. (2009). Politics and legislation in citizenship testing in the U.S. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 29, 37-48.

Kunnan, A., & Jang, E. (2009). Diagnostic feedback in language assessment. In M. Long, & C. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp. 610-627). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Messick, S. (1989). Validity. In R. L. Linn (Ed.), *Educational measurement* (3rd ed. pp.13-103). New York: American Council on Education and Macmillan.