

PREFACE

This book offers a basic introduction to two related fields: language testing and language programme evaluation. Although these two terms are frequently brought together in academic courses and conferences, there has previously been no single introductory text that systematically approaches both areas and makes connections between them. In seeking to fill that gap in scholarly work, this course addresses the language teaching profession generally as well as students of applied linguistics and English language teaching. The book aims to encourage closer relations between language testing and language programme evaluation, both in academic curricula and in professional practice.

The course introduces readers, not just to basic concepts, but to some of the major social, educational and research concerns and activities that characterise language testing and evaluation. It sets out to awaken interest in these issues, but does not presume to satisfy that interest. The text aims to be exploratory rather than authoritative in treatment and style, and to offer clear and concise introductory discussions rather than final conclusions.

The book can serve either as a basic text for a taught course, or as independent reading in self-study mode. All chapters include suggestions for further reading, and discussions frequently point towards possible explorations in classroom research and practice. The activities in each chapter further encourage readers to make links between ideas that are introduced and their own experiences of language teaching, learning and use. Direct questions and forms of address to the reader are used in the activities for reasons of clarity and economy. Many activities should lend themselves to small-group interaction. Individual readers are encouraged to note down responses and reactions, and to compare these with comments by other readers (where possible) and elsewhere in the text itself.

A glossary of key concepts is provided. The definitions are designed to be convenient but not exhaustive, and readers are referred back to discussions in the text.

The course provides a preliminary overview of language testing and evaluation, leading into explorations of issues and practices that can relate these two areas. More comprehensive treatments of its main topics can be

found in other works, and the select annotated bibliography in particular suggests points of further departure. Indications of further reading at the end of each chapter, especially those in the later chapters, should be useful to people pursuing ideas for follow-up tasks.

The course excludes from its scope various uses of language testing in the course of applied linguistic research, for example in second language acquisition or language aptitude studies, that typically have little direct impact on the evaluation of language programmes. It also says little about the large-scale international language tests that are prominent in much of the published language testing literature, but which impinge directly on the evaluation of only a rather special subset of language teaching programmes. (Some of the best known of these tests are briefly introduced in an appendix.) The course is more obviously concerned about the effects of examinations in school systems. Its treatment of programme evaluation will concentrate on internal evaluation of a single curriculum by teachers, rather than on external evaluations and comparisons across different teaching programmes. These choices reflect the introductory aims of the course and the readership for which it is primarily intended. They do not otherwise imply any attempt by the writer to delimit or prioritise research enquiry and professional activity in language testing and language programme evaluation.

I am grateful to the Department of English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore, for affording me the working opportunity to design a course in Language Testing and Evaluation and to prepare this book. I would like to thank my colleagues, past and present, for their support. Special thanks go to the external reviewer for Singapore University Press, whose constructive suggestions have greatly assisted the final revision. Above all, I would like to thank all the MA students I have taught on Language Testing and Evaluation courses at the National University of Singapore. The book has benefited especially from incisive and helpful feedback comments I received from students on the 1996/97 and 1997/98 courses, when draft versions were being piloted. Its final limitations are my responsibility.

Singapore, November 1998