



## From the Special Issue Editor

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this special issue of *Language Learning & Technology* focusing on the theory and practice of computer-based language testing. This issue contains three articles, two commentaries, and a response to one of the commentaries.

### Articles

In the first article, "[Comparability of Conventional and Computerized Tests of Reading in a Second Language](#)," Yasuyo Sawaki investigates various issues surrounding the effect of mode of presentation, that is, computer versus paper-and-pencil, on reading test performance. After an extensive survey of literature in cognitive ability as well as language assessment, ergonomics, education, psychology, and L1 reading, Sawaki concludes that it is difficult to generalize the results of these studies to L2 reading assessment. She emphasizes the need for further investigation of mode of presentation in L2 reading assessment, as well as consideration of mode of presentation in construct validation of computerized tests of L2 reading.

In the second article, "[Comparing Examinee Attitudes Toward Computer-Assisted and Other Oral Proficiency Assessments](#)," Dorry Kenyon and Valerie Malabonga report on the results of a study of examinee reactions to a tape-mediated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI), and a Computerized Oral Proficiency Interview (COPI). The authors found that due to the adaptive nature of the COPI, the examinees, particularly those at the lowest proficiency levels, felt that the COPI was less difficult than the SOPI.

The third article, "[Web-Based Language Testing](#)" by Carsten Roever, describes what Web-based language tests are, how they differ from traditional computer-based tests, and what uses they can have in language testing. After a brief review of computer-based testing, Roever categorizes WBTs as low-tech and high-tech, with low-tech tests currently being the most feasible. Consequently, his article describes item types for low-stakes low-tech WBTs, and discusses a variety of validation concerns specific to WBTs.

### Commentaries

In the first commentary, "[Language Testing and Technology: Past and Future](#)," Micheline Chalhoub-Deville situates the developments in computer-based testing within the context of language testing in general. In particular, she points out that whereas the language testing field has for some time promulgated performance-based assessment, CATs for the most part have yet to adequately meet the challenges inherent in proficiency-based testing.

The second commentary, "[Concerns with Computerized Adaptive Oral Proficiency Assessment](#)" by John Norris, discusses the technical and methodological innovations embodied in the COPI that make it an improvement over other types of technology-mediated tests such as the SOPI. At the same time, he expresses his concern about the ability of Computer-based Tests (CBTs) in general, and COPI in particular, to provide appropriate means for measuring the complex array of skills underlying L2 speaking proficiency with particular reference to the validity of the ACTFL *Guidelines*.



In their response to Norris' commentary, [Kenyon, Malabonga, & Carpenter](#) clarify some points brought up by him about the design features of the COPI and express their agreement with him about the need to conduct further analyses of the test. At the same time, while agreeing with him about the need to validate the ACTFL scale, they point out that from a policy and practice perspective, the ACTFL scale continues to be the only currently available widely accepted common metric for the assessment of speaking ability.

### Columns

The two columns in this special issue are also dedicated to the theme of computers in language testing. "[On the Net](#)," by Jean Leloup and Robert Ponterio, provides a detailed guide to Glen Fulcher's [Resources in Language Testing](#) WWW page -- a comprehensive site for those seeking information on a variety of topics related to L2 testing.

"[Emerging Technologies](#)," by Robert Godwin-Jones, provides a description of some of the mostly widely used authoring tools and applications for designing language tests. A helpful list of Web-based testing resources, testing organizations, language tests, and authoring tools is included.

In keeping with the theme of these special issues, our reviews focus on the topic of computers in language testing.

In the first review, [Marisol Fernández-García](#) reviews *Issues in Computer-Adaptive Testing of Reading Proficiency* (1999) edited by Micheline Chalhoub-Deville. This comprehensive volume presents a variety of perspectives on the use of CAT for reading assessment and, according to the reviewer, is likely to become an indispensable reference for language teachers, testers, and learners.

In the second review, [John Norris](#) reviews the second edition of *Computerized Adaptive Testing: A Primer* (2000) edited by Howard Weiner. It consists of 10 chapters that provide a thorough coverage of the theoretical, statistical, and practical foundations of CATs. According to the reviewer, no other single source is as inclusive as this book.

In the third review, [Paula Winke and David MacGregor](#) review version 5 of [Hot Potatoes](#) -- a template-based authoring program that uses HTML and JavaScript to support the development of six different types of Web-based exercises that feature some form of feedback. According to the reviewers, this user-friendly program is not intended as testing software.

In the fourth review, [Charlene Polio](#) describes *Test Pilot*, a useful authoring application for designing tests and administering them from a Web server. Among the attractive feature of this program, which was not specifically designed for language testing, are (a) it is user-friendly in that it requires no programming skills or knowledge of HTML, (b) authoring can be done on- or offline, (c) it supports multimedia, (d) test takers need only an Internet connection and a Web browser, (e) it allows item banking, (f) it supports computer-adaptive testing.

We hope you will find this special issue interesting and informative, and we look forward to your comments and future contributions.

Irene Thompson,  
Special Issue Editor