

Volume 27

**Multilingualism and Assessment:
Achieving transparency, assuring quality, sustaining
diversity – Proceedings of the ALTE Berlin conference,
May 2005**

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This collection of edited papers, based on presentations given at the 2nd ALTE conference, explores the impact of multilingualism on language testing and assessment. The 20 papers consider ways of describing and comparing language qualifications to establish common levels of proficiency, balancing the need to set shared standards and ensure quality, and at the same time sustain linguistic diversity. The contributions come from authors within and beyond Europe and address substantive issues in assessing language ability today. Key features of the volume include: advice on quality management processes in test development and administration; discussion of the role of language assessment in migration and citizenship; and guidance on linking examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages, including some case studies. This volume is a valuable reference for academics and policy-makers both within Europe and beyond, as well as a useful resource for practitioners seeking to define language proficiency levels in relation to the CEFR and similar frameworks.

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Series Editors' Notes:

The 1st international conference of the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) was held in Barcelona in July 2001, hosted by the Generalitat de Catalunya. The event celebrated the European Year of Languages that year and took as its theme 'European Language Testing in a Global Context'. Following the success of this inaugural conference, plans were quickly put in place for a second conference to be held in 2005. The Goethe-Institut hosted ALTE's 2nd international conference in Berlin from 19 to 21 May 2005 in support of the 50th Anniversary of the European Cultural Convention and focusing on the theme of 'Language Assessment in a Multilingual Context'. *Multilingualism and Assessment* – the 27th volume in the now well-established and highly regarded *Studies in Language Testing* series – is a direct outcome of the Berlin conference.

Members of ALTE were delighted to obtain the patronage of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Terry Davis, for the major 3-day language testing conference in Berlin; the event provided members of the international language testing and teaching community with a key forum for exploring the impact of multilingualism on language assessment, focusing on the needs to set common standards while at the same time sustaining linguistic diversity. The conference considered ways of describing and comparing language qualifications to establish common levels of proficiency, and offered a forum for the discussion of issues associated with quality, ethics and transparency in assessment. The fundamental aims of the ALTE members have always been to work on common levels of proficiency and common standards for the language testing process designed to support the mutual recognition of language certificates in Europe and the increase of quality and standards in their production and delivery.

The Council of Europe declared 2005 the European Year of Citizenship through Education and one of the aims of the year was to support democratic citizenship and participation in order to promote social cohesion, intercultural understanding and respect for diversity and human rights. In that context, the Council of Europe (Language Policy Division, Strasbourg) and ALTE set up a joint forum at the 2005 Berlin conference, focusing on political and ethical issues involved in defining and assessing the language proficiency required for citizenship and active participation of newcomers in social, occupational and democratic processes. Some of the papers in this volume explore in detail the key themes addressed during that forum. ALTE, an International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO) of the Council of Europe since 2003, has been in existence for almost 20 years, having been founded in 1990 following a proposal by the Universities of Cambridge and Salamanca. There were eight founder members, including the Goethe-Institut, and membership has grown over the intervening years to the present total of 31 members, who between them represent the testing of 26 European languages. Additionally, ALTE currently has more than 30 institutional affiliate organisations participating in its activities.

A key achievement of ALTE's work since the early 1990s has been the development of the ALTE Framework of language examinations, linked to the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), using work carried out in the ALTE 'Can Do' Project.

Close co-operation with the Council of Europe has continued in recent years with work on the *Pilot Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the CEFR*. Also important has been the development of a multilingual glossary of testing terms. The glossary, originally produced in 10 languages, is published as Volume 6 in the *Studies in Language Testing* series, and has since been developed in a further 10 European languages. More recently, ALTE working groups have been set up to look in more detail at projects such as testing younger learners, development of a Breakthrough level, as well as issues related to quality assurance in the test

development and delivery process. Many of the projects undertaken by these groups and many of the documents developed by ALTE have been supported by the European Union Lingua Fund. ALTE has also worked closely with the European Association for Quality Language Services (EAQUALS) in recent years to produce a European Language Portfolio (ELP) for adult language learners, validated by the Council of Europe, and has with EAQUALS developed an electronic version of the ELP in English and French, available at www.eElp.org

A full listing of all the presentations given at the ALTE 2005 conference can be found at the end of this volume. As will be apparent, the 20 conference papers presented here represent a selection of the many excellent presentations made in Berlin reflecting a wide range of topics and concerns; they provide a flavour of the key themes addressed at the conference. The introduction to this volume by Lynda Taylor and Cyril J Weir helps to highlight and summarise for readers the various strands which resonated throughout the conference, and points to implications for the language testing community.

At the time of writing, we look forward to ALTE's 3rd international conference hosted by University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations in April 2008, on the theme of the social and educational impact of language assessment. We anticipate this will provide an invaluable opportunity for the European and wider international language testing community to revisit some enduring concerns of shared interest as well as to explore some new ones.

Michael Milanovic and Cyril J Weir
Cambridge, March 2008

A large, light blue, stylized number '27' is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page. The '2' is a simple, rounded shape, and the '7' has a long, thin vertical stroke extending downwards. The overall style is clean and modern.