

Bachman, Lyle F.

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Lyle Bachman has been one of the leading theorists in the field of language testing for the last three decades. He was born in Iowa, USA, in 1944 and received his BA, MA, and PhD (1971) in English, all from Indiana University. Although his PhD was in English literature, his dissertation was in second language acquisition, and was based on research he conducted with schoolchildren learning English in Thailand. After completing his PhD, he went to the University of Hawai'i as assistant professor in the Departments of English and Second Language Studies. After a year in Hawaii, he took up a position as project specialist with The Ford Foundation in Thailand, where he directed a large-scale longitudinal research and development project in individualized English language instruction for Thai elementary schools. It was while in Thailand that he developed an interest in quantitative research and language testing. In 1976, he took a position in Tehran, Iran as director of a joint University of Illinois–Tehran University project for developing ESP materials for university students. In 1979 he returned to the USA as assistant professor in the division of English as a second language at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. In 1989, he moved to the University of California, Los Angeles, where he has been since, as professor of applied linguistics teaching courses and seminars in language assessment, language program evaluation, research methods, and epistemology in applied linguistics, and directing student research projects in language testing. He has also held temporary appointments as chair professor and director of the English Language Teaching Unit at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (1994–6) and Fulbright fellow and visiting professor in the faculty of education at the University of Hong Kong (2008–9).

At the time of writing, Bachman had authored and edited 13 books, 35 journal articles and reviews, and 32 chapters in books. He is a frequent speaker at various academic and professional conferences and meetings, and at universities around the world; at last record, he had given 126 presentations. He has provided consultancies for over 60 university departments, government, nonprofit, and commercial organizations; a few of the prominent agencies include the National Research Council's Board on Testing and Assessment, Educational Testing Service, and the Center for Applied Linguistics in the USA, and the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations in the UK, the University Grants Committee in Hong Kong, the Language Teaching and Testing Center in Taiwan, and the Academy for Continuing Education and Human Resource Management in Germany.

Bachman's major academic contributions have spanned the last 30 years. One of his major areas of interest has been the validity of language tests and validation as a process for not only supporting the interpretations of test scores, but also as a procedure for conducting research into the nature of language ability. His first series of publications in this area included (the first two with Adrian S. Palmer) "The Construct Validation of the FSI Oral Interview" published in *Language Learning* (1981b), and "The Construct Validation of Some Components of Communicative Proficiency" (1982), "The Trait Structure of Cloze Test Scores" (1982), and "Performance on Cloze Tests With Fixed-Ratio and Rational Deletions" (1985) all published in *TESOL Quarterly*. Two book chapters, "Convergent and Discriminant Validation of Oral Proficiency Tests" (Bachman & Palmer, 1979) and "The Multitrait-Multimethod Investigation Into the Construct Validity of Six Tests of Speaking

and Reading" (Bachman & Palmer, 1981a), and "The Construct Validation of Self-Ratings of Communicative Language Ability" (Bachman & Palmer, 1989), published in *Language Testing*, were all examples of empirical research in language testing using sophisticated techniques such as exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. They also demonstrated to researchers that a theory of language proficiency could be tested with data using the factor analytic method. These empirical studies were followed by a series of more critical, interpretive studies in validity, including "The Evaluation of Communicative Language Proficiency: A Critique of the ACTFL Oral Interview," with Sandra Savignon (1986), published in *The Modern Language Journal*, "Problems in Examining the Validity of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview" (1988), published in *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, and "Constructing measures and measuring constructs: a discussion of the research into the nature of language proficiency conducted as part of the Development of Bilingual Proficiency Project" (1990a). His concern with issues of validity and the nature of the constructs we measure have continued with more recent publications, including, "Some Reflections on Task-Based Language Performance Assessment" (2002) and "What is the Construct? The Dialectic of Abilities and Context in Defining Constructs in Language Assessment" (2007).

These investigations into validation and the nature of language ability lead to a series of books, beginning with *Fundamental Consideration in Language Testing* (1990b) which explored these issues in depth. In this first book, he brought to the field Messick's unified view of construct validation, and combined his own concept of test method facets and communicative language ability, building upon Canale and Swain's conceptualization of communicative competence, to formulate a framework for guiding research and development in language testing.

This was followed by *Language Testing in Practice* (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), which applied research findings and theoretical notions to the practical development of language tests. In this book, he and Palmer elaborated the concepts of target language use and test usefulness (composed of reliability, validity, authenticity, interactiveness, practicality, and impact). The latter concept deconstructed Messick's unitary model of validity with the intention of providing practical guidance for test developers in evaluating the validity of score-based interpretations. In *Language Assessment in Practice* (Bachman & Palmer, 2010), he built upon and extended the work of Kane and Mislevy in educational measurement by applying Toulmin's practical argument structure to develop an assessment use argument as the central principal for guiding the development and use of language assessments.

Bachman's work has also made a contribution in the area of statistical analyses and research methodology. Through his empirical research he has demonstrated the usefulness of employing appropriate and sophisticated statistical techniques in the analysis of test content and test results. One of his empirical studies that has been particularly influential, in terms of methodology, is the Cambridge-TOEFL comparability study (Bachman, Davidson, Ryan, & Choi, 1995), in which he and his colleagues investigated the underlying traits of the two EFL test batteries by employing exploratory factor analysis. His book, *Statistical Analyses for Language Assessment* (2004) and the accompanying workbook (Bachman & Kunnan, 2005) attempt to make the tools of statistics accessible to both practitioners and researchers. In his most recent work, Bachman has explored issues in empirical research in applied linguistics. In "Generalizability: A journey into the nature of empirical research in applied linguistics" (2006), he traces the methodological differences in approaches to empirical research in applied linguistics to differences in the epistemological and ontological perspectives of researchers themselves, and lays out an analytic framework for characterizing and understanding these differences.

An additional contribution is Bachman's mentoring of a new generation of language testing researchers, earlier at the University of Illinois and now at the University of California,

Los Angeles. At last count, he had supervised over 30 doctoral dissertations; most of which employed concepts such as communicative language ability, test-method facets, test usefulness, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling, and most recently, an assessment use argument. These studies have typically investigated the underlying traits of tests and the relationships among test-taker characteristics, test-taking strategies, test-method facets, test performance, and test use.

Bachman has received many awards and honors; they include the TESOL/Newbury House Award for distinguished research (1985), president of the American Association of Applied Linguistics (1988), two Kenneth Mildenerger Prizes for outstanding research publication in teaching foreign languages and literature from the Modern Language Association of America (in 1991 for his book *Fundamental considerations in language testing* and in 1997 for his coauthored book with Palmer *Language Testing in Practice*), president of the International Language Testing Association (1996), the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Language Testing Association (2004), Distinguished Scholarship and Service Award from the American Association of Applied Linguistics (2010) and honorary professorships from the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology and the Guangdong Foreign Studies University.

Bachman's service to the field of language testing has been broad as well: he participated in a meeting of language testers during the TESOL Convention in Boston in 1978. This meeting was the genesis for the Language Testing Research Colloquium (LTRC) which has become the premier international conference in language testing, being held annually in different cities in the world. Bachman has been a co-organizer of LTRC many times in collaboration with colleagues (Adrian Palmer, Antony Kunnan, Bonny Norton Pierce, Jim Purpura, Nathan Carr, and Lianzhen He, to name a few). He was also the coeditor of the journal *Language Testing* and the coeditor of the book series *Cambridge Language Assessment Series* (both with J. Charles Alderson). The book series made available very useful titles on assessing different language use activities (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), components of language ability (grammar, vocabulary), assessing languages for specific purposes, assessing young learners, and assessing language with the use of computers.

SEE ALSO: Language Testing in Second Language Research; Statistical Analysis of Test Results; Task-Based Assessment; Uses of Language Assessments; Validation of Language Assessments

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Suggested Readings

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