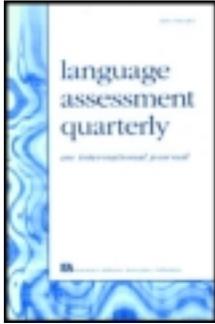


This article was downloaded by: [National Institute of Education]  
On: 02 May 2014, At: 22:46  
Publisher: Routledge  
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954  
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH,  
UK



## Language Assessment Quarterly

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hlaq20>

### 40 Years in Applied Linguistics: An Interview With Alan Davies

Antony John Kunnan

Published online: 16 Nov 2009.

To cite this article: Antony John Kunnan (2005) 40 Years in Applied Linguistics: An Interview With Alan Davies, Language Assessment Quarterly, 2:1, 35-50, DOI: [10.1207/s15434311laq0201\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15434311laq0201_2)

To link to this article: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15434311laq0201\\_2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15434311laq0201_2)

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is

expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

## INTERVIEW

---

# 40 Years in Applied Linguistics: An Interview With Alan Davies

Antony John Kunnan  
*California State University, Los Angeles*

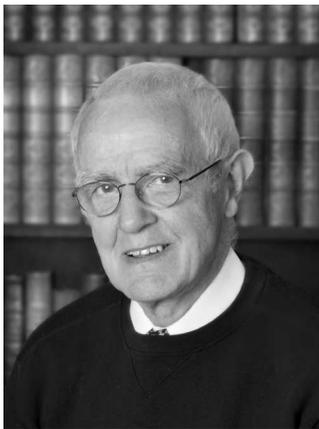


Photo: PhotoExpress, Edinburgh, UK

Alan Davies

Professor Alan Davies was born in Wales, studied at Oxford University and Birmingham University, and taught in Scotland at the University of Edinburgh, completing 40 years this year. You might think therefore that Alan did not leave the shores of the United Kingdom. This is hardly the case as he has travelled widely to give invited talks and seminars, participate in applied linguistics conferences, and even hold the posts of school teacher in Kenya; Head of the English Department, Tribhuvan University, Nepal; Director of the Language Testing Research Centre at the University of Melbourne; and Distinguished Professor of Applied Linguistics at Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

From his early interest in language teaching and testing in West Africa to projects in Nepal and India and his later stints in Australia and Hong Kong, Alan was interested in the broad area of applied linguistics. This can be seen through his publications in language testing for specific purposes and populations, impact of tests, testing eth-

ics and policy, second language acquisition, sociolinguistics and dialects, the native speaker, and general language teaching and learning. In addition to developing this wide range of interest, he has been most prolific in his publications. A book of 28 essays edited in his honour by Elder et al. (2001) documents his efforts: As of 1999, Alan has published five authored books, nine edited books, 92 articles as solo author, 13 joint articles, 24 important notes, reviews and review articles, and he was the lead author on the video recording on second and foreign language assessment titled *Mark My Words* and the *Language Testing Dictionary*. In the last few years, Alan has for sure added to this list; in fact, he gave a plenary talk at the Language Assessment Ethics Conference in Pasadena, California, in 2002, co-edited the Blackwell Handbook of Applied Linguistics (2004), and then guest edited articles on ethics for *Language Testing* (1977, Volume 14, Issue 3) and for *Language Assessment Quarterly* (2004, Volume 1, Issue 2&3).

In addition to his teaching and writing, Alan served as co-editor of two important journals in the field: *Applied Linguistics* and *Language Testing*. Also, in 2000, he served the International Language Testing Association (ILTA) as its President, during which time he chaired the Committee on Ethics to develop the ILTA Code of Ethics. In 2003, Alan was awarded ILTA's first Lifetime Achievement Award for distinguished service to language testing (sponsored by UCLES) at the Language Testing Research Colloquium at the University of Reading, Reading, UK.

In his free time, Alan is known to ride his bicycle on long trips from Edinburgh and enjoy reading fiction and poetry and sampling different wines. Although Alan and I have met regularly at various conferences and spent time together in Canada, Finland, Hong Kong, Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom, this interview was completed over a period of a few months in mid-2004 by electronic mail. As you can imagine, because there was so much to talk about with Alan, the interview could have been much longer if there were no space limitation.

AK: Alan, can you talk about your early years, school and college. Did you find yourself interested in language matters in school or college? Or did this interest come later?

AD: I was born and brought up in Wales, still a bilingual country. The urban south where we lived was largely anglophone, but my family was typical of many, with both Welsh and English native speakers. My mother's family were hill-farmers and Welsh speakers, while my father's family lived and worked in the industrial docklands and were English speakers. It was, of course, more complicated than that: Welsh had been spoken by my father's grandparents, and my mother's family were all fully proficient in English, which was for everyone the language of schooling. My parents had been at school together; for them English was their world, English was our home language while Welsh was for them and indeed for many Welsh speakers, dismissed as second-class, redolent of the past, the old and of traditions

that were embarrassing. At my primary and secondary schools Welsh was taught as if it was a foreign language, ranking well below the real foreign languages, French and German, deader even than the officially dead languages, Latin and Greek. And although I continued with French and Latin to the end of my school-days, I was more interested in language than in languages. At Oxford University, where I studied English, the name given the degree I enrolled for was English Language and Literature, something of a misnomer, since by language what was meant was literature in an earlier form of English, that is Anglo-Saxon (or Old English) and Middle English, while the Literature syllabus ended in 1830. The young hobbit lovers of today might be jealous of the teaching I received from Tolkien, but I can assure them that that teaching was very much one-to-many where Tolkien lectured to a large audience, and it was quite unexciting, wholly about Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight, a famous Middle English text. Of hobbits and rings there was nothing. I enjoyed literature, enjoyed discussing it and analysing it, as I still do. But what I was looking for—I realised much later—was a methodology for analysing the language of the texts we were exposed to. We were being given lots and lots of text tokens (for which exposure I remain very grateful, only wishing I had read even more) while what we needed was to be shown how to analyse these into types. It was somehow all implicit and we were expected to do the explicit making ourselves. What was lacking was the metalanguage we needed to help us analyse the language examples we were reading. I suppose what I was looking for was something linguistic but in the middle 20th century, in one of the old universities, what represented linguistics was philology and I suppose if I had had the wit to realise it that could have been my way into a wider linguistic understanding. But I didn't have the necessary wit and thought that what really mattered in language was literature. (My answer to that now is that of course it matters, but it doesn't really matter.)

AK: What was your first job? Did it involve language teaching?

AD: When I took my first secondary school teaching post, it was as an English (literature) teacher. But again, that is not strictly accurate since much of English teaching (teaching English as a mother tongue) in UK secondary schools is about developing reading techniques and writing skills. It was by now the end of the 1950s, British colonies were starting to gain independence. I was offered a job in an African "boys" school in Kenya: there the curriculum was entirely English-based and the examinations part of the old Cambridge school certificate regime. For me, what mattered was liberating the colonies and English teaching was my chosen instrument. What I didn't realise was that teaching English to young Africans was not exactly the same as teaching it to grammar school boys in the home counties. It took me several years to realise that not only was it not exactly the same, it was

very different and that what I lacked was precisely what I had felt to be missing during my English Language and Literature degree, knowledge about language.

AK: Tell us about your work in Africa in the 1960s. You edited a well-known volume titled “Language Testing Symposium” in which you have a paper on oral English testing in West Africa? Was this the time you also developed the Davies Test?

AD: In 1962, after 4 years, we went back to the UK on leave, intending to return to Kenya. The house we had found for the leave was in Birmingham, in a complex of missionary furlough housing and although we did not regard ourselves as missionaries, the school we worked in came under missionary auspices and so we qualified for a furlough house. I had arranged to register for a Master’s degree at Birmingham University to work on a topic that brought into sharp relief the language issue: it was the concept of *négritude* among (certain) African writers in English. Black francophone writers such as Senghor and Césaire had discussed for 20 years their lack of what they regarded as essential for their writing. They were concerned with what they saw as their loss of identity, a concern not at that time shared by the Anglophone writers, such as Soyinka and Achebe. (This may now have changed since James Ngugi [now publishing under the name Ngugi wa Thiong’o] decided to write in future in Kikuyu rather than in English.) Soon after my arrival in Birmingham I was invited to give some advanced English language classes to overseas students in the University Education Department who were funded on what was then known as the Commonwealth Bursars’ scheme under the Colombo Plan. The idea behind this scheme was to assist with post-experience teacher training in a range of subjects but mostly in English. A further invitation followed: this was to apply for a post as Research Fellow on a new project funded by the British Council to develop means of assessing the English proficiency of students and visitors who were coming to the UK under British Council auspices. The Council had recognised that its current methods of assessment, which were basically subjective judgements in-country, were flawed and that they should develop more objective measures. In this they were influenced by the deliberations at the Makerere Conference on the Teaching of English and the work at Manchester University of George Perren, who later established the Centre for Information on the Teaching of English. The University of Birmingham was invited to take on the English proficiency testing project to be directed by Professor Edwin Peel, a leading psychometrician. In due course I was appointed to the Research Fellowship, abandoning my work on *négritude* so that I could register for a PhD for my work on the testing project.

It was a privilege to work full-time on the proficiency project. There was time to deliberate, to discuss, and to experiment. We took a two-pronged

approach, using structural tests (grammar, phonemic contrasts) and work-samples (bits of real lectures and pieces from real articles and text-books, plus a listening test of awareness of ironic signals in an invented conversation between two students). It became clear that from a statistical point of view the structural component was sufficiently robust and that the work-sample sections did not add to the test's variance. But of course, there were good reasons for retaining these work-sample components, if only to convince the many stakeholders (as they were not then called) that we were concerned about real language use. The test, known as the English Proficiency Test Battery, was eventually put into operation by the British Council in late 1965 and continued to be used world-wide until about 1980.

My work on the English Proficiency Test Battery (EPTB, referred to by some, though not by me, as the Davies Test) gave me cause to think about the influences on language tests of various disciplines, psychology, linguistics, sociology, education, and itself having a reciprocal influence on society and the individual. To attempt to provide a coherent view of these ideas, I planned the "Language Testing Symposium," which was published by Oxford University Press in 1968. The book remained in print just about as long as the EPTB remained in use by the British Council, but like all collections of papers by various hands it could not provide a unified view of the field as Robert Lado's *Language Testing* had done in his 1961 volume and Rebecca Valette attempted in her *Modern Language Testing* (1967, 1977 editions). Such an up-to-date unified view had to wait until the 1990s with the publication of my own *Principles of Language Testing* and Lyle Bachman's *Fundamentals of Language Testing* (both in 1990).

AK: In the 1970s, you were involved with the publication of the Edinburgh Course in Applied Linguistics later—volume 4 which has the articles on testing and evaluation. What was the significance of this project—language testing and applied linguistics were in the same series?

AD: From Birmingham I moved to the Department of Applied Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh. This was one of the first academic departments to profess applied linguistics as a subject in its own right, and to use the name as the title of the Department and of its awards. It was in its heyday quite large (up to 11 academic staff) and because Applied Linguistics was a new subject, most of the staff were in the early part of their careers. Much attention was given to the working out and developing of a curriculum (what is Applied Linguistics?) and to the provision of teaching materials. Colleagues sat in on one another's classes and then offered follow-up tutorials. The idea was to link together the various areas of Applied Linguistics so that both staff and students could understand that Applied Linguistics was a unitary, coherent field, not just a collection of unrelated topics. It was

these team-teaching efforts that made us think about presenting in book form the ideas and materials developed in the Edinburgh Department: hence the first three volumes of the Edinburgh Course in Applied Linguistics (1973–5), edited by J. P. B. Allen and S. P. Corder. During the later preparation of the three volumes I was on a two-year leave of absence at Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. The coverage given to language assessment and evaluation was small and so when I returned to Edinburgh I proposed that a fourth volume be prepared: this became the 1977 fourth volume of ECAL, edited by Allen and Davies, with the title *Testing and Evaluation*. Looking back now at that fourth volume, it can be seen to have come at the close of the structural approach to language testing. It acknowledged the burgeoning work on communicative language testing but it did not make that its focus. Great attention to communicative language testing (CLT) followed in the 1980s, though, as we may now reflect, never replacing the structural approach, but adding to it.

AK: During this time, your publications show that you were also interested in language learning, dialect, register, and later on you were interested in language loss, planning, ESP, discourse, native speaker, and so on. You seem to have a continuing interest in topics other than language testing ... as well as serving as the co-editor of *Applied Linguistics*. Was this due to your professional situation or your planned intention to expand into other areas?

AD: My first encounter with testing came during my postgraduate Diploma of Education year when I wrote a dissertation on Intelligence Tests. I had, as a schoolboy, been exposed to the (in)famous 11+ examination, which at that time was used for selection to secondary school, a large component of which contained an intelligence test. (It's interesting to note that such tests, which came under huge political attack in the second half of the 20th century, because they were seen to be divisive and biased, are now being reinstated, but at the end rather than the beginning of the secondary school.)

Language testing, I have always seen as a component of Applied Linguistics. No doubt this goes back to the idea of the coherence of Applied Linguistics. And while language testing in my view is central to Applied Linguistics, in the way that SLA Research is also central, I have always been interested in other aspects of Applied linguistics, notably in applied sociolinguistics and sociology of language. That explains, perhaps, how I came to publish on register, World English(es), Standard English, the native speaker, and so on.

AK: I don't know if you remember, when I was a lecturer at the Regional Institute of English, Bangalore, I was the editor of their in-house publication, and you sent us a manuscript titled "Words or discourse: What should reading tests measure?" It was published in the RIE Journal in 1985. A couple of years earlier, I had met you for the first time at the RIE when you visited

the Institute to conduct an evaluation study of Prabhu's Communicational Project to teaching English, what came to be called the Bangalore Project. What are your thoughts now regarding the evaluation and the project?

- AD: I have rather mixed feelings about the Bangalore Project. As far as our evaluation was concerned (Berretta & Davies, 1985), I am clear that we designed and implemented a robust experimental design and that the five tests we constructed did what we intended. I also think that our conclusions, that there was some evidence to support Prabhu's hypothesis about task-based language learning—was correct—a conclusion that was quite properly qualified and hedged, suggesting that there were grounds to investigate the issue in other contexts. What we also insisted on (or at least I did in my written report) was that projects such as Prabhu's could be viewed very differently in terms of the premises they claimed: whether they were to be seen as psycholinguistic investigation (such treatments can lead to such and such results in individual cases) or as educational investigations (whatever the situation, treatments of these kinds will lead to favourable results). In my view the project should be seen as of the first kind; in special circumstances the Prabhu-type treatment is effective. This is rather like the claim for the exceptional learner in SLA Research. Prabhu himself, it seemed to me, was quite clear that he was making the first of these claims. But my co-investigator, Alan Beretta, later changed his mind, misunderstanding, I think, what claim was being made. Because the project did not use regular classroom teachers, generalisation was, he argued, not possible. But the project never intended to present a case for generalisation.
- AK: Tell us about your involvement with the British Council in English language teaching during its glory days. Do you think the Council was on the right track then in East Africa, India, and later China? Now, I'm told, the Council has pulled back most of its English language teaching operations except if it can be part of poverty alleviation? Is this an appropriate policy for the times?
- AD: My own involvement with the British Council started in the early 1960s. I was, as I have mentioned, studying at the University of Birmingham when I got caught up in the British Council project to develop an English Proficiency Test Battery. And so I abandoned anglophonic negritude for anglophonic proficiency, stayed on in Birmingham for about two and a half years, developed the first two versions of the EPTB, and wrote a related PhD, with the title: "Proficiency in English as a Second Language." After Birmingham I moved to the University of Edinburgh and that has remained my base up to the present. I continued to work on British Council projects, often in evaluation, in summer schools and so on. I was for 6 years a member of their English Teaching Advisory Committee (ETAC) and got to

know many of the British Council English Language Officers (ELOs), both in London and around the world. And in 1969–71 on leave of absence from Edinburgh, I accepted a British Council funded post at Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, where I was Head of the English Department for two years. My EPTB continued to be used by the British Council and several Council officers who had responsibility for language testing in the Council spent time on a training programme with us in Edinburgh. Bravely, during the 1980s, the Council on its own developed the English Language Testing Service test, the successor test to the EPTB. This turned out to have practical problems but its implementation and its production showed both what those problems were and how far it is possible to make language testing communicative: all this by a non-academic organisation, putting those of us in academic departments to a certain amount of shame that we had not at least attempted such development.

In the early years of my involvement with the Council, I was impressed by the professionalism of its cadre of ELOs. This was in no small part down to the vision and the commanding presence of the Controller, English Language Division (ELD), Arthur King. After he left the grip of the British Council on ELT loosened: this would perhaps have happened even if he had stayed, but it is tempting to remark just how important leadership is (for good and ill) and that no-one with equivalent stature followed King.

British Council policy and its funding base have changed radically in the last 15–20 years. This has meant that, like other public institutions, it has been incumbent on the Council to commercialise its activities: English as a Foreign Language is therefore widely on sale in Council teaching operations and there is much less advisory work done on ELT for free. And of course as English Teaching has grown world-wide, what has also developed is the range of local professionals to do the work that was once done by foreign (that is British) ELOs and, indeed, within the UK by Departments of Applied Linguistics. To that extent it could be argued that the British Council has been successful: along with its academic partners it has promoted the seemingly unstoppable growth of ELT which is now very largely self-sustaining. As far as ELT is concerned, the Council is now in the position that the USIS was in the 1960s, encouragement without professional backing and knowledge. The specialist libraries are being abandoned and there are no parts of the Council to which one can look for informed and current expertise in ELT. That may have been inevitable; it is nonetheless regrettable.

AK: What was your involvement with the ELTS, which has now become the IELTS? What were the principles in its design? I'm contrasting this with the design principles of the TOEFL that chose to go with a three skills test (without speaking) in a full multiple-choice option response format.

- AD: I had no involvement with the design of the new English Language Testing Service test. What happened was that in the mid 1970s, by which time the EPTB had been operational for ten years, I intimated to Bernard Lott, then Controller of ELD, that it was time to consider revising or replacing the EPTB. It turned out that a similar suggestion had been made by Council ELOs. The decision was taken to locate the new test at the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) and a representative committee was established to oversee development. But very quickly the Council representatives on the committee (notably Brendan Carroll) announced that the construct they had of the new test did not seem to be shared by the other members of the committee who, in their view, were content to replicate the past and had no intention of moving to a (new) communicative paradigm. And so they disbanded the committee and thereafter developed the new test in-house in the Council. I was a member of the original committee but had no input on the test during its development. As the test (now known as the English Language Testing Service test, ELTS) was becoming operational, I proposed a validation study; this was agreed by the Council and over the next 3–4 years my colleague Clive Criper and I carried out the ELTS Validation Study (1988). Our findings gave tentative support to the ELTS construct, but the test seemed to us to be unnecessarily complicated and altogether impractical. We recommended that a new ELTS be designed, which would take account of our comments and simplify test delivery. The ELTS Validation Study was accepted by the Council, funding was provided and plans drawn up to develop an ELTS successor test, later known as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).
- AK: You retired after a long stint at the Department of Applied Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh—how long was it? Looking back, what were the most satisfying aspects of teaching there, one of the first departments that focused on Applied Linguistics —perhaps, the first to use the term?
- AD: I was first appointed as lecturer in the University of Edinburgh in 1965. In due course I was promoted, first to Senior Lecturer, then to Reader, and finally to Professor. When I retired from the University of Edinburgh in 1995, I was given the title of Emeritus Professor and made an Honorary fellow, a position I continue to hold. This entitles me to a room, computing, and library facilities (but no car parking rights!). I do a small amount of teaching and examining. When my term as Honorary Fellow ends in 2005, I will have served the University of Edinburgh for 40 years. For me the most satisfying aspect of teaching Applied Linguistics over this period has been helping Master's course students discover or realise that their personal experience of language teaching etc. could be illuminated and explained by the insights we were presenting in Applied Linguistics. New

students often enrolled with us because they needed the Master's qualification for promotion and so on. If they had questions at the outset they were often questions to which we had no answer (I would add to which there were no answers). Gradually, they started asking the "right" questions, questions that in our view were meaningful in Applied Linguistics terms. Cynics might say that we were indoctrinating our students: on the contrary, every academic discipline needs a group of like-minded professionals who share an understanding of what their subject is about and how its parts relate together. What we saw happening, what we helped happen, was the professionalizing of our students into Applied Linguistics. That for me was the most satisfying aspect of my years in the University of Edinburgh.

The term *Applied Linguistics* was not widely current when what was then the School (later Department) of Applied Linguistics was established at the University of Edinburgh in 1957, with Ian Catford (later of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor) as its first Director. I believe it was the first time the label was used to name an academic department. It had been used earlier in the USA as the title of the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C., and even earlier as the subtitle of the journal *Language Learning: A Journal of Applied Linguistics*.

- AK: After your retirement from Edinburgh University, when you became the Director of the Language Testing Research Centre, Melbourne, were there any noticeable differences in terms of language testing, applied linguistics in Australia?
- AD: In the late 1980s, Joe lo Bianco set up the innovative National Languages Institute of Australia (NLIA), with five research centres in various fields of Applied Linguistics. The University of Melbourne agreed to establish a Language Testing Unit and I was invited to be its first Director. I took leave of absence from Edinburgh and spent the period January 1990–September 1991 in Melbourne. I then returned to Edinburgh but four years later I was invited back to Melbourne and so, a year shy of my official retirement date, I retired from the University of Edinburgh and went back to Melbourne as Director of what was now called the Language Testing Research Centre (LTRC) for a further three years. For me the move to Melbourne was a renewal. The LTRC was self-funding but in its early days, partly because of government support for the NLIA (now renamed the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia – NLLIA), money was available for a whole raft of projects and to employ a team of researchers, who have all, ten years on, made signal contributions to the field: Tim McNamara, Cathie Elder, Tom Lumley, Annie Brown, Noriko Iwashita, Gillian Wigglesworth, Liz Grove, Katharine Hill all worked for periods at the LTRC, creating a real community of scholars. For me it was invigorating to be away from Edinburgh, where Applied Linguistics was no longer the val-

ued subject it had been in the 1960s and 70s, prey to age, staff movement, and the predations of Theoretical Linguistics. This retreat has continued and in 2004 (the year of this interview) there is no longer an entity called Applied Linguistics in the University of Edinburgh.

AK: Two projects that have interested me for a while that came from LTRC were the “Dictionary of Language Testing terminology” and the “Mark My Words” 6-video tape series on language testing. How did these two projects come about? How did the video-series get executed? What do you see as the value of these projects?

AD: Funding for the LTRC came from research projects and contracts; typically, we submitted tenders that were successful enough of the time. These projects enabled us to develop new tests and carry out evaluations. But all too often the new tests failed to become operational: we were never strong on delivery. My view was that as a large research group we had a lot to offer to the profession in terms of training and professionalizing but that we needed to anchor this contribution more firmly and in more enduring ways than in tests, however innovative, that just sat in our store-room. True, there were some lasting contributions: at least six PhDs were researched and successfully gained by members of LTRC staff. That was important. But it was, it seemed to me, also important to present to the field the collaborative work we had enjoyed at LTRC. With this in mind we secured funding for a set of videos, intended as an introduction to some of the main areas of language testing, particularly of proficiency language testing. These videos were authored by us, produced by an independent producer, and directed and developed in-house in the University of Melbourne. We gave the series the title “Mark My Words” and made them available for sale. Looking back we should perhaps have thought more about distribution and negotiated from the outset with a commercial publisher, although undoubtedly that would have put constraints on our own planning. The videos have become reasonably well-known and are in use in various centres for teacher training purposes. The second collaboration we engaged in, with some support from the NLLIA, was to produce a “Dictionary of Language Testing.” Work on this project was always part-time and in consequence took several years to complete. The final product, with six authors, was eventually published by UCLES/CUP and has been well received. For us at LTRC at that time, what our work on the dictionary did was to provide us all with a common terminology for language testing and to offer opportunities for us all to learn about the field. With that in mind, for most of the time headword definitions were allocated randomly, rather than giving them to those with the existing specialist knowledge. Draft definitions were panelled and redrafted, sometimes several times.

AK: At about this time, your interest in Ethics seemed to have peaked, first with the Colloquium you organized at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, and

the one that Liz Hamp-Lyons organized at the TESOL Convention in Orlando, Florida. This also resulted in the development of the Code of Ethics that was written primarily by you and approved by the ILTA in its Vancouver meeting in 2000. How did you come to this area of knowledge? And, why did you feel the need to apply it to language testing?

AD: In the early 1990s, the newly established ILTA was greatly concerned to develop a code of standards (or of practice). This proved difficult to achieve for an international organisation but the ambition remained strong. When I returned to Melbourne I became interested in the role of language in Australian immigration policies: the access test had been developed at the LTRC during my absence as an attempt by government to provide itself with an immigration filter. I read up on the history of language and migration in Australia, particularly the infamous dictation Test, designed to support the White Australia policy. And so when we were planning our contribution to the triennial AILA Congress to be held in Jyväskylä, Finland, in 1997, I proposed that we offer a symposium on Ethics and Language Testing. Colleagues agreed and in due course the papers given at the symposium were published as a Special issue of Language Testing. Meanwhile, the then President of ILTA, Tim McNamara, asked me to chair the ongoing but somewhat inactive committee on a Code of Practice for ILTA. I accepted the invitation and proposed to my fellow committee members that in the first instance we should develop a Code of Ethics, for two reasons: (1) a Code of Practice must inevitably rely heavily on an ethical code and therefore in order to think about practice we needed first to think about ethics; (2) the attempts to develop the Code of Practice had failed, it seemed to me, because it had been found too difficult to legislate internationally without appearing hegemonic. I thought that while a single Code of Ethics was perfectly possible for everyone to agree to since all cultures and societies can agree on ethics, how you interpret these ethics, how you practise your ethics may well be incommensurable. We went ahead and developed a Code of Ethics for ILTA, which was accepted by the Association at its annual meeting in 2000. The attempt to develop a Code of Practice is still alive and I have agreed to chair a new committee for that purpose.

AK: What role do you think the ILTA Code of Ethics should play in the professional lives of language testers? What is the distinction between the Code of Ethics and the Code of Practice you are currently working on for ITLA?

AD: A Code of Ethics demonstrates to the members of an association or of a profession what its standards are: it operates as a display to others and, at the same time, as a reminder to the members of the profession what they expect of themselves and of one another. It defines their view of themselves and of their profession and is, therefore, a defining component of their pro-

fessionalism. A Code of Practice instantiates that Code of Ethics and, if it is to succeed as a statement for an international organisation then it must build in variable ways of interpreting practice, ways which are all recognised as being compliant with the ILTA Code of Ethics. This is a very tall order indeed, as we are finding.

If and when ILTA has achieved the development of both a Code of Ethics and a Code of Practice, then I would envisage the Code of Ethics being used largely for external display with the Code of Practice as much more an internal document, a *vade mecum* for individual members' reference.

AK: Given your long association with the field, do you feel there have been some important moments, important books, papers, conference presentations that have stayed with you for all this time?

AD: Just as the influences of childhood remain strong, so those first readings when you enter a new field can retain their significance and power. And so, for me, Robert Lado's *Language Testing* (1961) is still iconic. I should also mention some more recent publications: let me suggest Brian Lynch's *Language Assessment and Programme Evaluation* (2003). In the late 1980s, we held a joint BAAL-AAAL seminar on communicative competence. This was an important occasion and the papers were later published as a Special Issue of *Applied Linguistics* (10/2; 1989) but, although for me it was a memorable occasion, somehow it was disappointing, we never did get to grips with what communicative language teaching means, which could of course be an indictment of the very concept. The other publication I want to mention is the volume *Issues in Language Testing* (1981) edited by Alderson and Hughes. This book contained the key papers that had been circulated and an edited version of the subsequent discussions at a seminar in Lancaster. Three current issues were considered: these were communicative language testing, testing of English for specific purposes, and general language proficiency. This was a creative way to mount an academic meeting and I am glad to have been part of it.

AK: Now that many tests are delivered in the computer mode and some are even computer-adaptive tests, what are your thoughts on computer-assisted language tests?

AD: Work on computer-based language testing has been going on for the last 20 years. I feel about it much as I do about e-mail: this is a new genre that can take the pace of older modalities but does not replace them. We still wish to write letters. Legal and other documents still need to be written and circulated by snail mail methods. Some of the discussions of computerised language testing suggest that it could replace all existing language tests. But wait a moment! Just as e-mail cannot replace one-to-one connection, nor

even one-to-many, so computerised language testing cannot replace the normal ordinariness of real conversation.

AK: You have been interested in the concept of the “native speaker”—you have a book on the subject. What are your views on dialects and testing especially in world-wide English language testing contexts as in, for example, the IELTS and the TOEFL?

AD: My reading of the native speaker concept is that it represents both a reality (some people are native speakers of Language X and some are not) and a myth (the range of types of native speaker of Language X is so great that it is difficult not to include proficient second language speakers, or native users as they have been called). Language testing clearly relies on some native speaker model since it is this model that determines the description of Language X, both its micro and its macro functions. Thus even if we take (for our target) near-native speakers (that is highly proficient educated learners) we are still dependent on our native speaker model for our judgement as to their near native ability. At the same time the construct we use (the model) for our tests is necessarily not based on a real person but on—precisely—a construct, an idealised representation of what we think native speakers are, know and can do.

AK: You have also written about the use of language tests for immigration and citizenship, tracing the racist policies of the early Australian government. Language assessment now is also used for country identification of refugees. What are your thoughts on this really high-stakes testing context?

AD: Using language assessment for identification of country of origin of refugees presents us with two problems. The first is that such identification is necessarily unreliable since it will be carried out by untrained (in phonetics, etc.) judges. The second problem is that country of origin for many (those, for example, who have been in refugee camps for a generation) is problematic. Furthermore, those very people who are at home on the margins (for example Kurds in Iraq) may well emerge on the tests as not identifying centrally with the country of origin they claim and yet they are the ones most likely to be punished if they are sent back.

AK: As an editor of the *Language Testing* journal for many years, do you have any suggestions for this nascent journal?

AD: The problem for a new journal is how to steer a path between over-acceptance of submissions in order to fill the early pages and defining a unique contribution, demonstrating that this new journal occupies an empty and an important niche. It helps to advertise that contribution to the profession by active soliciting, most obviously by offering special issues so that readers become aware early on of the kinds of papers and topics that the editors seek. And so in the first three years I would suggest at least one and possibly two special issues per year. My other suggestion would be to

send out for review only those submissions that the editors consider publishable, rather than send all submissions for review.

AK: When you look forward, any thoughts on the future of language testing? What directions do you think might be worth pursuing? What challenges to take on and which to side-step?

AD: In his *Allegory of Prudence* Titian writes, “The present does well to profit from the past, lest future conduct go astray.” I prefer this epigraph to Henry Ford’s “History is bunk.” In language testing what we can learn from the past is that there are no easy answers, that language in all its complexity cannot be reduced to instances of so-called reality, that methodologies are just that, ways of giving us access to learning and knowledge, and that testing is not the same as teaching, which means that the concern of the language tester is to collect the evidence s/he needs not to help or encourage the student directly. Because in the event the right evidence will be the best way of helping and encouraging students.

AK: Thank you very much for taking the time to discuss so many aspects of your life and academic accomplishments. I feel you’ve enjoyed every aspect of your work to the fullest extent possible. On behalf of all our readers, I wish you more accomplishments for many more years to come.

## REFERENCES

- Alderson, J. C., & Hughes, A. (Eds.). (1981). *Issues in language testing*. ELT Documents No. 111, London: The British Council.
- Applied Linguistics*. (1989). [Special issue]. 10(2).
- Elder, C., Brown, A., Grove, E., Hill, K., Iwashita, N., Lumley, T., et al. (2001). *Experimenting with uncertainty: Essays in honour of Alan Davies*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Lado, R. (1961). *Language testing*. London: Longman.
- Lynch, B. K. (2003). *Language assessment and programme evaluation*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.
- Valette, R. (1967). *Modern language testing*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Valette, R. (1977). *Modern language testing* (2nd ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace.

## ALAN DAVIES’ PUBLICATIONS REFERRED TO IN THE INTERVIEW

### Authored Books

- Davies, A. (1990). *Principles of language testing*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Davies A. (1999). *Language testing dictionary* (with A. Brown, C. Elder, K. Hill, T. Lumley, & T. McNamara). UCLES/Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

## Edited Books

- Davies, A. (1968). *Language testing symposium*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Davies, A. (1977). *Testing and experimental methods*. In *Edinburgh course in applied linguistics* (Vol. 4). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

## Video Recording

- Davies, A. (1996). *Mark my words: Assessing second and foreign language skills* (with A. Brown, C. Elder, R. Evans, E. Grove, K. Hill, N. Iwashita, T. Lumley, & C. O'shannessey). Multimedia Education Unit, University of Melbourne.

## Guest-Edited Special Journal Issues

- Davies, A. (1977). The ethics of language testing. *Language Testing*, 14(3).
- Davies, A. (2004). The ethics of language assessment. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 1(2&3).

## Articles

- Davies, A. (1968). Oral English language testing in West Africa. In A. Davies (Ed.), *Language testing symposium* (pp. 151–179). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davies, A. (1985). Evaluation of the Bangalore Project. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 39, 121–127 (with Alan Beretta).

## Documents

- Davies, A., & Criper, C. (1988). *English Language Testing Service Research Report 1. ELTS Validation Project Report*, British Council/UCLES.
- ILTA Code of Ethics*. [Prepared by the ILTA Committee on Ethics chaired by Alan Davies]. Author: ILTA.