New Approaches to Assessing Language and (Inter-)Cultural Competences in Higher Education

Nouvelles approches de l’évaluation des compétences langagières et (inter-)culturelles dans l’enseignement supérieur
Introduction: Three keys to understanding the new *culture* of language and (inter-)cultural assessment in higher education

*Fred Dervin & Eija Suomela-Salmi*

Assessment is a topic about which people have strong opinions, though whether those opinions are backed up by a good understanding of what it is and how it works is less certain. (Boud 2006: xvii)

L’évaluation est un processus extrêmement complexe, délicat à manier, profondément ressenti par les partenaires de l’acte éducatif. Elle recèle des dangers et des avantages qu’il faut assumer simplement parce qu’elle est une composante indispensable de la classe. (Porcher & Abdallah-Pretceille 1998: 52-53)

Assessment is omnipresent in our postmodern societies, with each and every one of us, as Boud asserts *supra*, having an opinion about it. As such, we are all constantly involved in various assessment activities. Some are more conscious of their involvement and what makes assessment transparent, valid and valuable; for others, this is not the case. In order to illustrate this phenomenon, let us take some examples recorded on an October day in 2009.

The first example is based on an event witnessed by one of the editors of this volume who was sitting at a municipal library in a small Finnish town. A “native-speaker” of French was giving a private lesson to a Finnish child. They were rehearsing a dialogue from a textbook. The child kept making mistakes while reading and the French teacher interrupted him, making him pronounce each of the words he failed “perfectly” and commenting on how careless he was, how his mistakes showed that he hadn’t studied enough, etc. Despite not resembling the traditional idea that most of us have of assessment (a “paper & pencil” test, based on criteria…), the teacher was definitely “assessing” the child’s performance. This type of assessment is a regular occurrence.

In its monthly supplement, the Finnish national newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* asked some “language specialists” to assess famous Finnish politicians’ competence in English. Though the negotiation of the criteria started with a discussion on the *Common European Framework*, the specialists agreed on the following hypothesis: the more a typical Finnish TV-viewer feels nervous about the politician’s English when s/he is using the language, the lower the grade. The testers were to serve as TV-viewers and were shown some media documents. The awarded grades ranged from 0 (President Passikivi in 1952) to 10 (Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander Stubb). The Finnish President, Tarja Ha-
lonen, who was given an 8, received the following review: ‘She makes mistakes, which are typical of Finns. She says close my phone while she should say turn it off. The word agenda is typically mispronounced like most Finns. Some of her articles and prepositions are also wrong’. This resembles the more traditional assessments which take place in language education, though the criteria and comments are highly debatable...

All in all, although these examples taken from daily life differ in importance, “professionalism” and transparency, they show that assessment is firmly established and accorded a degree of importance in daily practices.

Background

This volume deals with the context of higher education and emphasises language education. Despite the long-standing interests in language and (inter-) cultural assessment in higher education, no other collected volume, to our knowledge, has been devoted to the issues related to the assessment of language and (inter-)cultural competences, nor has any such volume attempted to explore the many and varied topics and contexts covered in this book (Australia, Britain, China, Estonia, Finland, France, Italy, Japan, Romania, Serbia).

Though assessment is often thought to be a neglected area in the academia, according to Astin (1991: 1), ‘Practically everybody in the academic community gets assessed these days, and practically everybody assesses somebody else’. As such, students get assessed by teachers, teachers by peers, students by students, teachers by students… In higher education, assessment is related to a minimum of four institutional activities: admissions, guidance and placement, classroom learning and certification. In the classroom, assessment takes place, amongst other examples, through course examinations, assessment of course projects (homework, term papers), and course grades (Astin 1991: 8). If we consider the case of language education, all these institutional and class activities are frequently in use.

Assessment is a multifaceted and value-driven phenomenon, which has at least two meanings: measurement (the gathering of information) and evaluation (utilization of that information for institutional and individual improvement) (Astin 1991: 2; cf. Byram 2008 for a discussion on the dichotomy assessment-evaluation). Moreover, Barnes (1999: 252) explains that assessment has many purposes: diagnosis, selection, prediction, examination, grading, evaluation, backwash, motivation, research… (cf. also Oudart 2008).

In some contexts of education, such as post-16, i.e. Advanced/Advanced Subsidiary levels and their equivalents in other countries, assessment has been systematized. Evoking the end of secondary education, Barnes (1999: 251) reminds us that ‘Assessment should not be simply an ‘add-on’ activity, seen as distinct from the rest of the programme and carried out under formal conditions...
at the end of a large block of work or at the end of a course. Assessment should be regular and integrated into normal teaching and learning’. Is this (or should it be) the case in higher education and/or should it be? What sort of assessment is taking place? What purpose does it serve? What representations surround assessing language and (inter-)cultural competences in higher education? This is what the authors of the chapters set out to tackle.

The idea for this book originally grew out of the reflections and work of a Finnish research project sponsored by the Ministry of Education in which we were both involved between 2004 and 2007. Entitled ECC-Lang (Assessment of Cultural and Language Competences), the project comprised staff involved in the teaching of French at the universities of Helsinki, Jyväskylä, Oulu, Tampere, Turku and Vaasa and aimed to assess first year university students’ skills in French language and intercultural competences in the departments of French Studies and in language centres. Another aim was to increase the transparency and comparability of assessment standards between the partner universities and allow students to move freely and without major restrictions between these universities. Assessing language and intercultural competences in French studies in higher education had never been tackled on such a scale in Finland, and we were faced with many challenges. First of all, we noticed that in order to be able to assess, we needed to agree on the aims of learning and teaching French at university, review our assessment and teaching practices, and agree on what forms of assessment we were interested in. Though most of us wanted to produce some assessment material (i.e. grids) largely inspired by the European Framework, we soon realized that the Framework could not just be imported into our project without being extensively transformed to fit the academic context and that alternatives to summative assessment should be considered.

Regarding what was assessed; the project members decided to concentrate on written competences and produced a grid of four components, inspired by those described by the European Framework: linguistic competences (syntax, morphosyntax, and lexicon) and pragmatic competences (textual macro-organization, discursive and enunciative competences). We eventually dropped the assessment of oral competences and proposed a list of academic savoir-faires that should be developed by the end of the first and third years at university, thus “eliminating” the intercultural/cultural components as these were technically and ethically problematic (who of us was “competent” to assess? What contexts of interaction should be taken into account? What “cultures” are we talking about when we refer to intercultural competences? etc.). By the end of the project, we considered academia to be a “culture” in itself and that students’ (inter-)cultural competences should thus exclusively be applied to this context. Based on the fruitful (and sometimes heated) discussions around these aspects, an international bilingual conference (English and French) was organized by the Univer-
University of Turku to gain insight into what colleagues worldwide were working on and what successes and failures they had come across in terms of assessment. The chapters in this volume are from speakers who participated in the conference.

Based on what we learned from the research group, literature review and discussions at the Turku conference, we are proposing in what follows three keys to understanding what could be called a new assessment culture with respect to language learning and teaching in higher education. This new culture stresses the systematic and reflexive integration of assessment into teaching and learning, the active role of the student in assessment processes, assessment of both product and process instead of a numerical score. It is also closely related to socially constructed assumptions about the nature of reality (Lynch 2001). The reader will bear in mind that, when we talk about assessment culture, we mean a range of characteristics related to assessment that are not fixed and unique but changeable, adaptable and diverse (cf. Dervin’s discussion of the concept in this volume).

Key no. 1: Political, institutional and social discourses on assessment

Those involved in higher education will no doubt agree that there is now a general feeling in most countries that political, institutional and social pressures regularly call for further assessment and evaluation – sometimes in what seems like an uncontrollable spiral. According to R. Murphy (2006: 36), higher education has reacted slowly to the “new culture of assessment” of our times and he jokingly asserts that ‘Gone are the days when it was assumed that anyone clever enough to gain a university post through their demonstrated scholarship and research would without doubt be able to pass on their wisdom to students without thinking too much about how to do it [assessment] effectively’ (Murphy 2006: 35). Today, there is a general emphasis on quality assurance and control in higher education, which has largely impacted on the understanding of the necessary links between course objectives, learning outcomes, progression, etc. – though some would argue that it is not always clear in reality. The role of higher education has also changed. Though written in 1990, the aims of higher education proposed by Astin (1991: 4) seem more valid than ever in the 2000s: ‘to facilitate student learning and development’, ‘to advance the frontiers of knowledge’ and ‘to contribute to the community and the society’. Assessing competences should thus often consider these three aspects. Finally, lecturers and teaching staff themselves are also pushed from “within”, as they are increasingly influenced by practices from elsewhere (so-called “good practices”) through access to world literature on assessment and language education.
global conferences, cross-national projects, Professional Development training... urging them to review the way they conceptualise assessment.

Key no. 2: New scientific discourses and approaches to assessment

The second key to the new culture of assessment in higher education, which in turn is related to the previous one, is based on the idea that we live through times where a new zeitgeist and new scientific discourses on approaches to assessment have emerged (cf. Suomela-Salmi in this volume; cf. Hofer and Pintrich 1997). Such a view contests the previously held behaviorist models which perceived learning as accumulation of bits of knowledge that can be attained starting from simpler elements and advancing towards more complicated systems. As Inbar-Lourie (2008) points out, this paradigm shift is also reflected in perceptions regarding intelligence, which is currently viewed as contextually framed and multi-dimensional. Such paradigms are related to the way we now conceive of teaching and learning in theory (and thus in practice). Amongst other examples, students are now expected to construct knowledge rather than replicate it; they should be actively involved in assessment processes, and focus on the application of knowledge to “authentic cases” (Clegg and Bryan 2006: 217). The famous dichotomy established by Stobart and Gipps (1997: vi) between assessment for learning and assessment of learning, sums up this perspective. This means that assessment should be fully integrated in the teaching-learning process and support learning rather than sanction it. Contemporary thinking (i.e., amongst others, postmodern, hypermodern, postcolonial, Queer theories) has also had an impact on how we perceive and implement assessment. Several vital aspects of assessment are often commented upon in theories and studies on assessment. For instance, we are often told that it should be valid, reliable... Yet, Murphy warns us that this is ‘an old-fashioned approach’ as ‘such concepts were imported into education from psychometric traditions in psychology, and have limited usefulness because of the way that they assume that all assessments are one-dimensional, and that they are steps towards producing a single “true score” to summarise the educational achievement level of a student’ (2006: 43). A move from “techno-rationalism” (Clegg & Bryan 2006: 224) in assessing language and intercultural competences is thus important in higher education. We need to recognise the fact that not everything can be assessed and that we should be interested in processes rather than products.

In the context of language learning and teaching, Mc Namara (2001: 337) has called for a review of positivist methods, given that they have been questioned on epistemological grounds in the humanities and social sciences (cf. the debate on objectivity and the increasing importance of complex thought in epistemology). According to the researcher, assessment ‘has a particular obligation to respond constructively to them [critical voices]’ (ibid.). This is extremely per-
tinent in language education: changes that have accompanied our conception of language over the last decades must be taken into account when assessing. McNamara (2001: 333) is of the opinion that:

Language testing is facing a fundamental challenge as a result of our growing understanding of the social character of its constructs and its practices. An awareness of language use as a social activity, of the socially derived nature of our notions of language, and of testing as an institutional practice, is causing language testers to look critically at their practices and the assumptions that underpin them.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, through the task-based approach that it puts forward, adopts a similar approach and has accompanied a number of changes, firstly in Europe and subsequently worldwide. Discourses related to and based on the Framework cannot but have an impact on Higher Education too – for better or for worse – and must therefore be taken into account.

Key no. 3: The “birth” of the subject

The next key to the new assessment culture is the “birth” of the subject in language education (Anderson 1999), i.e. people (teaching staff, learners…) are taken increasingly into account as individuals. It is clear that assessment, in its implementation, has an impact on all the actors: those who receive assessment through a grade, feedback, comments, etc. but also those who provide the assessment. As Porcher and Abdallah-Pretceille stated at the beginning of this introduction, assessment has many advantages for educationalists but it is potentially risky as it cannot but affect identities or the way(s) one sees the Self. Most teachers have probably wondered if what they are doing to students is fair or not, if it has an impact on how they see themselves... In fact, students themselves often ask for clarification, discuss and complain about the assessment they receive.

All the political, institutional, scientific discourses require new attitudes towards teaching and learning, along with a move from the notion of a “sage on the stage” to that of a “guide on the side” (Tella 1996: 13) is needed more and more in order for these attitudes to change. Learners should thus be taken into account as subjects and as Borich (1995: 31) puts it: ‘they need to be participants in the learning process rather than merely recipients’ as it is important for them to find directions, set objectives, etc. This is all highly related to the societal importance of higher education. Boud (2006: xviii) shares the opinion that ‘society today demands more than passive graduates who have complied with a fixed assessment regime. It wants people who can plan and monitor their own learning and to do so without continuous prompting from others’.
Many of the techniques already widely in use reflect these changes and the escalating importance of the subject – though they are not always systematised: formative, reflective and peer assessment, diagnostic assessment (through the use of interviews, diaries, journals, role-plays...). The multiplicity of the sources of information in selecting assessment strategies and interpreting assessment results is also essential in acknowledging the complex contemporary individual (Brown & Hudson 1998). Finally, the use of “authentic assessments” allows to ‘contextualize complex intellectual challenges’ which are ‘not fragmented and static bits or tasks’ (Boud 1995: 41). For language learning and teaching, this is an important component of current practices. In higher education though, and in the case of language specialist departments, there seems not to be enough evidence of this in the literature.

It is obviously true, as Cordelia Bryan told one reporter of the Times Higher Education in February 2009, that it is important not to use new approaches to assessment just through enthusiasm or because they are in vogue: ‘I would never want anybody to try a new assessment method because it is ‘trendy’ or because I’d said so. I’d want them to ask rationally, ‘is that going to help the student and is it going to help me?’ You want to do it only if there is real benefit’. This is why learners and teachers alike need to both accept and be “taught” how to function in these renewed ways and learn to be critical of them.

Students themselves are increasingly aware of the importance of assessment and of its complexity, along with the need for transparency and comparability. This is clearly present in a document that was produced recently by the National Union of Students in Britain which addresses these issues (2009). In the document, they defined the following list of principles of effective assessment:

1. Should be for learning, not simply of learning
2. Should be reliable, valid, fair and consistent
3. Should consist of effective and constructive feedback
4. Should be innovative and have the capacity to inspire and motivate
5. Should measure understanding and application, rather than technique and memory
6. Should be conducted throughout the course, rather than being positioned as a final event
7. Should develop key skills such as peer and reflective assessment
8. Should be central to staff development and teaching strategies, and frequently reviewed
9. Should be of a manageable amount for both tutors and students
10. Should encourage dialogue between students and their tutors and students and their peers.

This is, of course, collective discourse, which corresponds precisely to political and scientific discourses; individuals, nevertheless, might feel differently about it. In an issue of the Times Higher Education of February 2009, we are told of students not always being open to new techniques such as self- or peer-
assessment. For instance, at the University of Herfordshire, engineering students who knew that peer assessment would be implemented in their laboratories responded: ‘I pay for your to mark my work’ and ‘I want my work marked by an expert’ (THE Feb 2009). This clearly shows one important aspect of assessment: both related discourses and practices are linked to economic aspects. The area of representations of assessment is emphasised in this volume.

Finally, the birth of the subject (the learner here) is highly related to the renewal of the notions of feedback and backwash (or washback). According to Gibbs (2006: 30), ‘feedback focuses on learning rather than on marks or students themselves; feedback is linked to the purpose of the assignment and to criteria (which in turn are related to curricula and syllabi), feedback is understandable to students, given their sophistication’. This is why it is important that students also learn to respond to feedback and act upon it. For teaching staff, it means reviewing the way they correct (versus merely mark) students’ production. For instance, the philosopher Rorty’s analysis of “final vocabulary” (1989) such as good, right, rigorous is useful for educationalists as they allow them to realize that these are not constructive enough, that they don’t leave enough space for manoeuvre and often represent empty signifiers. Explicit criteria should also guide feedback. In order to be useful to students, correcting should be supportive and thorough and allow the corrector and the correctee to enter into dialogue. This is also where the notion of washback (or backwash) or the impact of assessment on future performances, competences and results comes into play (Bailey 1996; Cheng et al. 2004).

Having now laid the foundation for the new culture of assessment of language and (inter-)cultural competences in higher education, the remainder of this introduction will present each contribution to the volume.

Structure

This book is designed for anyone involved in or interested in assessing language learning and teaching in higher education: students, teaching staff, postgraduate students and researchers. It concerns staff working in language centres, language departments but also in foreign language-medium studies. Staff members and scholars of any other field might also find it interesting as most of the issues tackled in the volume are not exclusive to language learning and teaching, thus enabling cross-disciplinary reflections. The book offers suggestions to stimulate innovation in assessment practice and learning through assessment. Many criticisms of various approaches to assessment are presented. The reader will also find that the book is a good companion to doing research on assessment.

The volume is composed of 16 chapters. The following questions are asked in most of the chapters: what can/cannot be assessed? What can be done

The book is divided into three main parts: conceptualizing language and (inter-)cultural assessment in higher education; can (inter-)cultural competences be assessed? and alternative assessment in language learning and teaching.

The first part is subdivided into two sections. The prelude contains three articles that help the reader to see how approaches to assessment can be conceptualized and questioned.

The first chapter, written by Sauli Takala, looks at the ubiquitous and highly influential Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and compares its components to the Finnish Matriculation Examination (equivalent to A/AS Levels and the International Baccalaureate). In other words, the author examines their potential calibration. Though the chapter does not deal directly with higher education, it is of interest to researchers and practitioners in this context as many attempts are being made to use and relate the Framework to different learning and teaching contexts. The chapter raises the timely issues of transparency, comparability and equivalence, while warning of the danger of ignoring local needs, expertise and contexts in trying to implement the tool.

In the second article, authored by Claude Springer, the task-based and competence approaches to language learning and teaching are discussed in relation to assessment in higher education. Springer shows how these approaches can help to further develop language learning and teaching and go beyond the acquisition of mere communicative competences as the transversal and social dimensions of languages are further taken into account. Collaborative learning situated in communities can also help to go beyond the traditional “loneliness” of the learner-centered approach. According to Springer, these approaches can also lay the basis for clear and explicit goals for assessment.

The third and last chapter of this section, written by Aleksandra Ljalikova, looks at practices and discourses related to quantitative and qualitative approaches to assessment within the Estonian context. Through examining test criteria used at the end of secondary education and at a language centre at the University of Tallinn, the author offers an analysis of the ways teachers assess written competences. This leads her to question practises that rely far too much on quantitative data and calls for methods that take into account to a greater degree the individual (the “Subject”) and combine both quantitative and qualitative data.

The following section is an attempt to delineate teachers’ representations of assessment practices. Teachers, and learners alike hold many and varied (and sometimes ready-made) discourses on assessing competences.

Emmanuelle Huver, in the first chapter, looks at interviews that she carried out with four university lecturers in France. She notices that the lecturers’
**habitus** in terms of assessment differ and derive largely from their own experiences of learning – rather than their training. This was also the case with regard to their representations of assessment, which were contradictory in many aspects. She concludes that assessment should therefore be fully integrated into teacher training – even in higher education – in order to ensure transparency, comparability and similarity in practices.

The second article is based on data collected during a literature course in French as a Foreign Language. The authors, Julie Rançon and Nathalie Spanghero-Gaillard, asked two university lecturers to present a text written by the French author Maupassant to their classes and choose words that they would explain. After the lessons, the researchers tested the students’ knowledge of these words as well as the teachers’ representations of what the students knew beforehand and what they had learnt during the lessons.

The second part of the book is entitled *can (inter-)cultural competences be assessed?* The (inter-)cultural aspects of language education have been increasingly looked at and theorized over the last 10 years. For instance, Michael Byram’s book, *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, published in 1997, is an important milestone in the reflections on assessing intercultural competences. This part examines cultural competences before going on to question the issue of interculturality and assessment.

The first section deals with cultural competence, i.e. knowledge, facts, socio-pragmatic aspects… about a different “culture”. The first article, written by Laure Ayosso, is an attempt at implementing the so-called “culture test” with local as well as international students of French at the University of Oxford. Her results show that cultural knowledge seems to increase with language proficiency, age and a range of individual and group characteristics such as level of competence in L2, geographic origin, age and so on.

In *The challenge of assessing the socio-pragmatic competence of language learners in an Australian university*, Colette Mrowa-Hopkins explores what constitutes socio-pragmatic competence, and discusses how it can be assessed. Basing her research on the arguments that most instances of intercultural misunderstandings occur when speaker’s intentions in ways of saying things are misinterpreted, and that they result from a lack of awareness of norms of interaction, the author triangulates various data collected at an Australian university to test language learners’ socio-pragmatic competence.

This section is closed by a chapter on self-learning and assessment in an *Institution Wide Language Programme* in vocational training in British higher education. The author of the chapter, Jacqueline Geoghegan, discusses how *Self-Managed Learning* can offer a possible solution to integrate the aspects of communication and culture in language education. She presents the implementa-
tion of such a scheme at the University of Bournemouth, which has yielded encouraging results for vocational education regarding assessment.

The next section looks at the assessment of intercultural competences, or how interaction is negotiated when two individuals from different countries meet.

The first chapter is a critical review of intercultural competences and related concepts. Fred Dervin, the author of the chapter, argues that before considering the assessment of intercultural competences, issues related to definitions and contradictory discourses on what these competences represent, must be settled. In the second part of his chapter, Dervin examines two models of competences which go beyond the usual functionalist-culturalist treatment of interculturality (i.e. for which culture explains everything and leaves no space for individuality and subjectivity). He demonstrates how these models could allow formative and summative assessment of intercultural competences.

Liang Wang’s chapter entitled Online exchanges – Localizing ICC assessment: A case in China, discusses the potential benefits and challenges of assessment in a Chinese context. He presents an Intercultural competence-oriented online language program for portfolio assessment (CoffeeTea) and gives details on the instructional and assessment design, along with the challenges he encountered. Data from group interviews and learning journals are analysed and put forward some evidence on the students’ intercultural reflection during the course.

The next chapter also involves technologies and explores the use of electronic diaries and the European Language Portfolio for self-, peer- and tutor-assessment of intercultural competences. The authors, Francesca Helm and Gillian Davies, base their study on Byram’s model of intercultural competences and apply it to the context of English language learning and teaching in Italy. The authors discuss each component of Byram’s model and show that the assessment of the interaction and attitudinal aspects of the competence can be facilitated by online contexts as learners are, amongst other things, allowed to look back and reflect on their language and intercultural learning, assess themselves and each other, as well as easily providing evidence of their performance.

The last section of the volume is devoted to alternative assessment in language learning and teaching. Though alternative assessment has been partly identified, experimented and discussed in previous chapters, the five chapters that compose this section concentrate exclusively on this aspect.

In the first chapter Eija Suomela-Salmi strives to give an overview of alternative assessment in the field of language teaching and language learning. Suomela-Salmi examines the different forms of alternative assessment as well as the role of different actors and the processes involved. She shows that even if it is sometimes considered as something “radically new” in language teaching and
learning, research dealing with different forms of alternative assessment in language learning contexts was already published a quarter of a century ago. She also discusses the notion of assessment culture and the way it is considered by different researchers and theoretical approaches.

In Exercice de conceptualisation; évaluation formative des apprenants et des enseignants, Marion Pescheux is interested in demonstrating how the formative assessment of learners is related to the self-assessment of teachers. Based on what she calls “exercises of conceptualisation” during which teacher trainees of French as a Foreign Language discuss their lessons and the learning outcomes, Pêcheux explains how they allow the teachers’ skills and lessons to be questioned and assessed.

Milica Savic’s chapter deals with peer assessment and tries to reveal if it leads to student autonomy. Set in Serbia, her study addresses peer assessment in university-level English as Foreign Language academic writing courses. Savic focuses on third year students’ ability to provide peer assessment and quality feedback. She is also interested in their attitudes to this alternative mode of assessment. In her conclusion, the author makes some suggestions as to how peer assessment can be fully and more successfully used in higher education.

The next article takes us to Japan, where Mitsuru Ohki studies the impact of self-assessment on the development of autonomy, motivation and linguistic competence of Japanese students of French grammar. Hypothesising that self-assessment is not “natural”, that it deserves training and that the more one self-assesses, the more motivated one is, the author proposes a quantitative analysis of the links between frequent self-assessment and training for it and self-motivation. The study shows that there are clear links between these phenomena in this context.

The last chapter deals with an alternative form of assessment in writing French as an Academic Language, which goes beyond mere linguistic competences. In this case, teachers are involved in what resembles peer-assessment. Based on an action-research project involving specialists of French in a Romanian university, Monica Vlad, Chantal Claudel, Georgeta Cislaru & Fred Dervin’s study examines how scholars from different countries assess formatively abstracts produced by the students for a student conference. Three similar criteria emerged from the analysis of their feedback: relevance of the research question, coherence between the research question, the corpus and the proposed research method, and the discursive construction of the abstract.

It is hoped that through the three keys to understanding the new culture of assessment of language and (inter-)cultural competences and the richness of these chapters, this volume will inspire and guide future research and teaching toward new ideas and directions in this vital field of education.