

IN CONVERSATION

Asian Association for Language Assessment Student Committee

Issue 5 (2019)



CONTENTS

- Editors' Note P. 1
- Inquiry, Insights, & Inspiration: An Interview with Prof. Knoch P. 2
- AALA 2019 Conference Coverage P. 4
 - Pre-conference Workshops
 - Graduate Student Networking Lunch
 - Words from Students Winners
- Fifth Anniversary of AALA Student Committee: A State-of-the-art Review P. 9
- AALA Information & Contact Details P.10

Editors' Note

In tandem with the 5th anniversary of Asian Association for Language Assessment Student Committee (AALA SC), we are delighted to present the 5th issue of *In Conversation* series that aims to engage our student members and graduate students in the field of language assessment.

We begin by interviewing Prof. Ute Knoch, a keynote speaker and workshop presenter of the 5th AALA conference, who shares her academic experiences, research interests, and future projects, and offers advice to budding researchers in the field of language assessment.

We then report the 6th International Conference of the AALA held in Hanoi, Vietnam. Details include keynote speeches, plenary speeches and our graduate student networking lunch initiated by AALA SC. Additionally, we invite student winners of AALA Best Student Poster Award, Best Student Paper Award, and Outstanding Dissertation Award, to share their ideas and experiences.

This issue also includes a review about the growth of AALA SC. The authors remind us about the important pages of AALA SC then and now, and it is our hope that we could work hand-in-hand with the energetic and thoughtful readers to compose the future pages of AALA SC.

Best,

Jiayu Wang & Don Yao (Editors)



(Opening ceremony of the 6th annual conference of the AALA)

Inquiry, Insights, & Inspiration: An Interview with Prof. Ute Knoch

Interviewed by Jiayu Wang



In this section, we are honored to invite the past Keynote speaker and workshop holder Ute Knoch to share her academic experiences and give some suggestions to student members in AALA.

Associate Professor Ute Knoch is the Director of the Language Testing Research Centre at the University of Melbourne. She has published widely with nearly 40 peer-reviewed publications which have been published in journals such as Language Testing, Language Assessment Quarterly, TESOL Quarterly, Applied Linguistics, Assessing Writing, Journal of Second Language Writing and Language for Specific Purposes.

Her research interests are in the area of writing assessment, rating processes, assessing languages for academic and professional purposes, and placement testing. She is currently the Treasurer of the Applied Linguistics Association of New Zealand (ALANZ), and the member of Association of Language Testing and Assessment of Australia and New Zealand (ALTAANZ), Applied Linguistics Association of Australia (ALAA), American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL), and International Language Testing Association (ILTA).

In 2020, Prof. Ute Knoch won ILTA/SAGE Best Book Award for the monograph *Assessing English for Professional Purposes* (2019) published by Routledge (with Suzy Macqueen). In 2014, She was awarded the TOEFL Outstanding Young Scholar Award by the Educational Testing Service (Princeton, US), recognizing her contribution to language assessment.

(Source : <https://findanexpert.unimelb.edu.au/profile/186949-ute-knoch> & <https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/language-testing-research-centre>)

Professional background:

As an established scholar in the field, you are the role model of numerous young researchers. Could you share some of your early experiences as a preliminary researcher, and why and how you entered the field of language assessment?

I became interested in language assessment during my Masters course. I liked how language assessment blends both psychometrics and insights from other areas of applied linguistics. And I really like how it is so practical and has real-life applications. These days, I really enjoy working with clients from outside of our field on solving real-world problems. When I first started out, I tried to get involved in many areas of language assessment, as a rater, invigilator, item writer, but also as a research assistant on a number of projects conducted by Assoc Prof Cathie Elder who was at the time establishing the Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment (DELNA) at the University of Auckland.

You are well-known for your contribution to rating issues. What motives you to study raters, rating criteria, and training, among a variety of issues in language assessment?

My initial focus was more on issues relating to rater reliability, but in recent years I have become much more interested in the construct that is 'hidden' in rating criteria and how the rating processes can be validated as a whole. It's an interesting area, because so many different aspects of the assessment interact with each other that it is hard to pull everything apart.

As a researcher with so many duties and publications, how do you manage you daily schedule?

This is a real challenge on a daily basis, and I feel that I am never doing anything well because I have to rush everything. I just try to be organized, keep a list of things I need to do and prioritize these each morning to meet urgent deadlines. But even with this in place, I often run behind time and I always feel guilty.

Research:

As an expert in rating issues, could you summarize for us about what have been done, what we are doing, and what are yet to be done in terms of rating-related research?

Could you introduce something about the research project you are working on?

I am working on various projects at any one time. I'm particularly interested in the assessment of the language proficiency of overseas-trained health professionals and how we can improve our assessment practices that are used as part of the registration processes of these professionals. It's an interesting area because it stretches what we consider 'language' and it also directly intersects with policy and policy considerations. So, I am hoping to dig deeper into this area in the next few years. I am currently working on a project that looks at the communication of overseas-trained nurses who have recently entered the workforce here in Australia, to examine what aspects of communication they particularly struggle with.

Advice for AALA student members:

What do you think of the most important skill for AALA student members for their professional development?

This is a difficult question to answer as it really depends on individual research interests. I think it is a good idea to get a good grasp on various statistics used in language assessment as this widens the type of research someone can do and/or interpret. But I also think it's really important to not overvalue statistics and get a good grasp of issues relating to test constructs and validation. My other suggestion is not so much a skill but a recommendation

to get involved in the language assessment community as much as possible by being involved in your local professional organization. The International Language Testing Association (ILTA) is also just establishing a Graduate Student Assembly, so there is another group students can get involved in. It's a great way to get to know established researchers and this opens many doors later on.

"My other suggestion is not so much a skill but a recommendation to get involved in the language assessment community as much as possible by being involved in your local professional organization."

It is not easy for new-comers in our field to publish their research. Could you give some suggestions to the AALA student members for their publication?

My suggestion would be to work as much as possible in teams with more experienced researchers. When I was a graduate student, I was lucky enough to be involved in a couple of team projects with established researchers and through carefully watching what they did, I was able to get a better understanding of the publishing process. It starts by making sure the journal targeted is appropriate for the work you would like to publish. I suggest only submitting an article when you are absolutely happy with it – this includes having it proof-read before submitting it. When responding to reviewer comments, carefully acknowledge and consider the feedback they have provided, even if you don't always fully agree with it. In 99% of cases, the comments will make the paper stronger, even if they can be annoying at times!

AALA 2019 Conference Coverage

Report by Ivy Chen

The 6th International Conference of the Asian Association for Language Assessment was held on October 16-18 in Hanoi, Vietnam, hosted by the University of Languages and International Studies - Vietnam National University, Hanoi (ULIS-VNU) and cohosted by The National Foreign Language Project (NFLP) of the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam with the associate hosts of the University of Foreign Languages – Hue the University and University of Foreign Language Studies – The University of Danang. The theme of the conference was “Language Assessment: Principles, Policies, and Practices”.

123 registered conference participants from over 16 countries and regions attended, among which there were 24 student participants. The conference comprised of four pre-conference workshops, two keynote speeches, three plenaries, a plenary panel discussion, two symposia, 55 papers, and 15 posters.

The first day of the conference began with a lovely opening and awards ceremony, followed by Barry O’Sullivan’s keynote speech locating the concept of a comprehensive learning system within

the socio-cognitive model of test development and validation, and linking it to the education of stakeholders, especially policy makers. This was also the day of our well-received graduate student networking lunch (see p. 5 for details). The poster session was held after lunch. Those of us who attended the banquet enjoyed a meal at Ben Bac and a cruise along the Red River, accompanied by Vietnamese performers.

On the second day of the conference, we continued with more interesting papers, symposia and plenaries. We ended the conference with Nick Saville’s keynote speech advocating for the use of plurilingualism in the classroom with the aim to assess language in terms of plurilingual competences.

Lastly, we’d like to congratulate once more the winners of the best student poster award (Sha Liu), best student paper award (Thuy Ha Lam Thai), and outstanding dissertation award (Zhang Xiaoyi). See page 7 & 8 for a few words from these winners.

Overall, it was an intellectually stimulating conference held in the beautiful ULIS campus.



(Group picture at the 6th annual international conference of AALA)

Pre-conference Workshops

Workshop 3: Speaking and Writing Rater Training

Report by Sha Liu

“Workshop 3: Speaking and Writing Rater Training” was conducted by Professor Sara Cushing, Georgia State University and Senior Faculty Associate for the Assessment of Student Learning in the office of Institutional Effectiveness.

The purpose of this workshop was to familiarise participants with scoring rubrics for the assessment of speaking and writing and to raise their awareness of the importance of ensuring the quality of scoring for assessment purposes. In doing so, Professor Cushing started the workshop with a brief discussion of the importance of using scoring rubrics for the assessment of speaking and writing. Then she walked participants through the process of rater training, using a classroom-based writing rubric and sample essays. By the end of the workshop, participants learned to align their own internal criteria for assessing writing with the language of a scoring rubric, match features of an essay with descriptors, and justify a numerical score. The workshop was highly interactive, which encouraged active and total participation from all participants, thus enabling them to get the most out of the highly informative and systematic review of scoring rubrics and theories underpinning the development and application of such rubrics in their own contexts.

Workshop 4: Assessing students in the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) classroom

Report by Kana Matsumura

As Dr. Llosa describes in her workshop booklet, language learners in CLIL classroom face a double challenge: they are learning content (e.g. science) at the same time as they are developing their L2 language proficiency. In the workshop, she showed how instructors can help learners appreciate content lessons by using science standards and instruction in the U.S. as an example. First, participants in the workshop were asked to imagine that we were ‘students’ in the CLIL classroom. We were shown the night sky with lots of stars and one shooting star in the screen. We were also asked to present anything we had seen in the screen. Dr. Llosa asked many questions that brought out target vocabulary and expressions from participants. Then she distributed a bag of real meteorite specimens to each group and told us to observe them with magnets and magnifying glass to express the properties. Through activities, unknowingly, we learned physics and science knowledge and vocabulary such as the universe, meteorites and gravity. In group work and pair work activities, participants would learn both knowledge and language skills by having conversations with group members in English and asking questions to the instructor. All the classroom activities were so exciting and interactive that they seemed such an improvisation. However, as Dr. Llosa explained, they were based on curriculum and lesson plans that had been well thought out by both language and content instructors. It should be this long process of effort that could support language learners in the CLIL classroom in ways that simultaneously promote their content and language learning. Through this workshop, we were able to understand the essence of CLIL and we got some tips that we can use in our classroom tomorrow!

AAAL Graduate Student Networking Lunch

Report by Don Yao

The AALA Graduate Student Networking (GSN) Lunch held at the University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS) in Hanoi on 17 October, 2019 was a great success. The main purpose of this session was to ask invited guests to share their wonderful career and research experience to graduate students or young scholars.

This year, we are very lucky that 7 invited guests attended this session including Prof. Barry O'Sullivan (keynote speaker), Dr. Nick Saville (keynote speaker), Dr. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Quynh (local chair), Prof. David Qian (Immediate past president), Prof. Antony Kunnan (founding president), Prof. Lorena Llosa, and Prof. Kellie Frost to share their life experience and their thoughts about research. One of the most sharing was that by Prof. Llosa who said: "As a graduate student, especially for those Ph.D. students, do not take study as the only one thing. Try to make some more friends and cultivate your own hobbies and interests!"

Following the sharing session, we had a raffle draw like previous years. In addition to a book on applied linguistics contributed by our immediate past co-chair Rongchan Lin and gifts sponsored by our co-chair Sha Liu and other speakers/EB members, Prof. Young-Shik Lee also contributed some gifts that he brought from Korea to our students.

Due to the time limitation, the whole session lasted for only 45 minutes. But after the session, our students would have a clearer sense of what s/he should do in the field of language assessment!



Words from Students & Dissertation Award Winners

AALA Best Student Poster Award



Hello AALA student members. I am Sha Liu, a doctoral student at School of Education, University of Bristol, UK. My research includes diagnostic assessment of writing, automated writing evaluation, and eye-tracking.

I am very lucky and honoured to have won the 2019 Best Student Poster Award. My doctoral research focused on using Automated Writing Evaluation (hereafter AWE) as a diagnostic assessment tool in Chinese EFL writing instruction. Despite the rapidly increasing use of and research on AWE in recent years, little has been known about whether and how L2 students engage with AWE feedback in the process of essay revision. However, students' active engagement is the key to unlock the perceived benefits of such feedback. Informed by the engagement theory and diagnostic assessment, my study set out to investigate how 25 Chinese EFL students at a Chinese university engage with Cambridge English Write & Improve® (a new AWE system) as a potential source of diagnostic feedback cognitively, behaviourally, and emotionally and explore the underlying reasons for such engagement. Data from multiple sources were collected and examined, including students' assignment records, eye-movement data together with subsequent stimulated recall interviews, reflection essays and questionnaire responses. Based on the preliminary findings, all participating students demonstrated a high level of engagement with Write & Improve and made active revisions in the process of essay revision. However, their way of interacting with the system differed because of a myriad of factors (e.g., English proficiency, previous AWE experience etc.). I am now still in the process of data analysis but it is believed that findings from this research may provide important theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical

implications. Theoretically, the investigation of AWE as a diagnostic assessment tool through the lens of engagement theory points to possible frameworks for the conceptualisation of further AWE research. Methodologically, the explorative use of eye-tracking measure may provide important implications regarding the feasibility of eye-tracking as a process-tracing method in AWE research. Pedagogically, the findings may inform writing teachers about how AWE can be effectively implemented to facilitate the teaching and learning of EFL writing.

I am indebted to my supervisors, Professor Guoxing Yu and Professor Sally Thomas, for their guidance and support. I am also thankful to Cambridge Assessment English for providing me with full access to Write & Improve. Additionally, I am extremely grateful to Education Testing Service for awarding me TOEFL Small Grants for Doctoral Research in Second or Foreign Language Assessment and to British Council for Assessment Research Awards and Grants. My sincere gratitude also goes to Colston Research Society for awarding me the Travel Award. Their generous funding allowed me to carry out my research and attend the conference at Hanoi, Vietnam.

Last but not the least, I would like to share with student members and graduate students in general a quote from PhD SOS that has inspired me along every step of my doctoral study journey: "A PhD is so much more than a degree. It can break you down into your most vulnerable form but has the potential to build you back together to become a resilient, determined, humble, and knowledgeable researcher. This process takes time and patience. Please don't give up on yourself. It's not just about getting the degree. It's about becoming who you are meant to be."

ALA Outstanding Dissertation Award



Self-introduction

My name is Xiaoyi Zhang. Currently I am working as a lecturer at Fudan University in China. I got my PhD degree in language testing and assessment from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and my research interests include but are not limited to the development and validation of rating scales in speaking performance assessment, language

proficiency scales, skill integration, reading diagnostic assessment, and computer-based language assessment.

Introduction of the study that won you the award

In my PhD dissertation, I applied and justified the interactionist construct theory in speaking performance rating. I first defined the speaking construct from the interactionist perspective, which can be readily applicable to relevant studies on speaking assessments. Based on that, I proposed three types of rating scales in accordance with the minimal, moderate and strong claims of interactionism. Then I conducted multi-dimensional analyses of how the rating scales affected the assessment of examinee performance, score consistency across tasks and raters, and score meaning and interpretation, using both quantitative and qualitative. All this helped me to depict a picture of how rating scale, with controlled interactions between learner factors and contextual variables, can influence speaking performance rating and the operationalization of test construct.

Suggestions to our student members and graduate students

Work hard and play hard! Don't forget to enjoy life and love yourself. 😊

p.s.: Particularly, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my supervisor Prof. Yan Jin, for her helping pave the way for my research, getting me involved in the project, and giving me full trust and support without any reservation. My equally heartfelt thanks go to Prof. Ute Knoch, Dr. Michael Linacre, and Prof. Jinsong Jason Fan, for their suggestions and quick responses to my problems on the

research. I would also like to express my gratitude to the National Education Examination Authority (NEEA), Ministry of Education and the Administration Office of College English Test (CET), for their financial and logistical supports during the process of data collection.

ALA Best Student Paper Award



Hello, I am Thuy Thai, a PhD student at University of Huddersfield, the UK. Being an awardee of the Best Student Paper this year is an enormous honour to me and a great recognition of the quality of my research project. I am very happy to share my story with you, AALA student members.

My research interests include speaking assessment and raters' scoring decisions. My award winning paper qualitatively looked at how a group of raters made sense of the first standardised test ever in their local context and how they made sense of the rating job they were doing. Moreover, my study tried to further understanding of how the raters made their scoring decisions. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Susan Sheehan, for her kind, encouraging, timely and critical feedback.

More importantly, I would like to thank AALA for organising such an amazing conference with not only the high quality of the papers presented but also the networking opportunities it offers, particularly to early researchers like me. I feel inspired and motivated to go forward. Thank you AALA!

Looking Back, Going Forward

By Rongchan Lin & Sha Liu

Following the official establishment of the Asian Association for Language Assessment (AALA) in 2014, the AALA Student Committee was formed in 2015 to serve and engage the student members of the AALA. While aligning to the overarching goal of promoting language assessment activities in Asia, the Student Committee is committed to serving the needs of graduate students and enhancing their professional development.



(AALA Executive Board and Student Committee Members in Taipei)

With the strong support from the AALA Executive Board led by the then-president, Professor Antony Kunnan, we were honored to be appointed as the founding co-chairs of the Student Committee. The other founding members of the AALA Student Committee (2015-2017) are Carol Dabarera (Secretary), Xiaohua Liu (Treasurer), Lin Lin (Public Relations Officer), Junghee Byun (Committee Member) and Matthew Wallace (Committee Member).



(AALA Student Networking Lunch 2017)

Under the guidance of our then-advisor, Professor Yan Jin, the Student Committee implemented several student-oriented initiatives. One key initiative was the release of the first issue of our AALA newsletter, *In Conversation*, in 2016. In that very same year, we also hosted our inaugural Student Networking Session at the 3rd Annual AALA Conference in Bali, Indonesia. At that particular conference, we launched two merit-based AALA Conference Awards, namely the AALA Best Student Paper Award and AALA Best Student Poster Award. The AALA Executive Board has also announced the inception of AALA Outstanding Dissertation Award in end 2016. This award recognizes Asia-based outstanding doctoral research that contributes significantly to the field of language assessment.



(Group Picture at the AALA Student Networking Lunch 2017)

In its few years of existence, the AALA Student Committee has come a long way. This would not have been possible without the strong support from our Executive Board, the dedication of fellow Student Committee members, and the active participation of our student members. We are extremely grateful to have the opportunity to work with experienced scholars and peers who are highly committed to serve our community at large. We have learned and grown a lot during this process.

By the time this article is published, both of us would have stepped down from our respective leadership roles. Handing over the reins to new leadership, we are confident that the Student Committee will grow from strength to strength with your continued support.

AAAL Founding Members (in alphabetical order)

He, Lianzhen (Zhejiang University)
Imao, Yasu (Osaka University)
Jin, Yan (Shanghai Jiao Tong University)
Kunnan, Antony John (University of Macau)
Lee, Yong-Won (Seoul National University)
Lee, Young-Shik (Hannam University)
Qian, David (Hong Kong Polytechnic University)
Sawaki, Yasuyo (Waseda University)
Wu, Jessica Row-Whei (Language Training and Testing Center)

AAAL Executive Board (2019-2020)

President

Yan Jin (Shanghai Jiao Tong University)

Co-President

Jirada Wudthayagorn (Chulalongkorn University)

1st Vice President

Nguyen Thi Ngoc Quynh (VNU University of Languages and International Studies)

2nd Vice President

Yasuyo Sawaki (Waseda University)

Immediate Past President

Jessica Wu (Language Training and Teaching Center)

Past President

David Qian (Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

Secretary/Treasurer

Cecilia Guanfang Zhao (University of Macau)

Communications Officer

Yasuhiro Imao (Osaka University)

Members at Large

Qin Xie (The Education University of Hong Kong)

Mingwei Pan (Shanghai International Studies University)

AAAL Student Committee (2019-2020)

Advisor

Nguyen Thi Ngoc Quynh (VNU University of Languages and International Studies)

Co-chairs

Don Yao (University of Macau)

Tatsuro Tahara (Waseda University)

Immediate Past Co-chairs

Sha Liu (University of Bristol)

Ivy Chen (University of Melbourne)

Secretary/Treasurer

Linyu Liao (University of Macau)

Public Relations Officers

Kana Matsumura (Waseda University)

Jiayu Wang (Beijing Foreign Studies University)

Committee Member

Tina Ren (University of Macau)

Committee Contact Information

AAAL Website: <http://www.aalaweb.com/>

Email: aalastudent@hotmail.com

Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/aalastudentcommittee/>

Facebook Group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/AAALStudentGroup/>

LinkedIn:

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/6941774/profile>

AAAL Student Committee In Conversation Series

Issue 5 (2019)

Editors: Jiayu Wang & Don Yao