

Diagnostic language assessment: From theory to practice

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Diagnostic language assessment has become an important focus for research in recent years, with journal articles, conference colloquia, books and a special issue in *Language Testing* all devoted to the topic. This attention connects with a growing interest in how assessment can best be done, or how large-scale assessments can be made most useful, in the language classroom; concerns which have also found expression in the related paradigms of learning-oriented (language) assessment, dynamic assessment and assessment for learning. However while there is agreement that diagnostic language assessment is potentially of great benefit to language learning and teaching, and that it presents a unique approach, there has been little agreement in the past as to precisely what a diagnostic language assessment process that is based on theoretical principles should entail. There is particularly limited discussion of diagnostic procedures for receptive skills.

This talk will present and discuss an approach to diagnostic language assessment which has been developed in two research papers (Alderson, Brunfaut & Harding, 2015; Harding, Alderson & Brunfaut, 2015). The talk will be in two parts. First, theoretical principles of diagnosis in language assessment which are based on insights from diagnostic experts in different professional fields will be presented. These principles will be elaborated with respect to classroom situations with a focus on listening. Second, I will consider the sort of research and development which is required to fully realise these principles of diagnostic assessment in practice. This would involve (a) developing web-based diagnostic tools for use in the classroom, and (b) developing the diagnostic competence of language teachers. Current and future research in this area will be charted, with the argument that a diagnostic approach to language assessment must proceed in tandem with a focus on enhancing and supporting the language assessment literacy of classroom teachers.