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LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT

Language Assessment or Language Testing is a field of study under the umbrella of applied linguistics. Its main focus is the assessment of first, second or other language in the school, college, or university context; assessment of language use in the workplace; and assessment of language in the immigration, citizenship, and asylum contexts. The assessment may include listening, speaking, reading, writing or cultural understanding. Equal weightage may be placed on knowledge (understanding how the language works theoretically) and proficiency (ability to use the language practically), or greater weightage may be given to one aspect or the other.

The earliest works in language assessment in the US date back to the 1950s to the pioneering studies and test created by Robert Lado and David Harris. The earliest large scale assessment in the US was the *Test of English as Foreign Language* (TOEFL) that was launched in 1961 by Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey. This test was designed to assess the English language ability of students applying for admission to US and Canadian colleges and universities. This test, which is used widely around the world, is still in use although it is now only available in the internet-based format (now called ibTOEFL). Many tests from other companies, universities and agencies compete for this market: the Pearson Language Test's *Pearson Test of English* (PTE), the University of Michigan's *Michigan English Language Assessment Battery* (MELAB) and the University of Cambridge, the British Council and the Australian IDP's *International English Language Testing System* (IELTS). In the US, non-profit and other organizations such as the Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D.C. and Second Language Testing, Inc. have developed language tests that are used by many public and private agencies. Many universities too, like the University of California, Los Angeles, Teachers College, Columbia University, the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, have developed English (and other) language tests to assess the abilities of their students and teaching assistants. These language assessments are generally known as proficiency or achievement assessments.

The International Language Testing Association (ILTA) is one of the many organizations that organizes conferences, workshops, and a public forum for the discussion of important matters. There are many annual conferences on general

or specific topics. The most important conferences are ILTA's official conference: the Language Testing Research Colloquium (LTRC) which has been held every year since 1978.

Language assessment or language testing courses are taught as required or elective courses in many graduate and doctoral programs, particularly in the subjects of applied linguistics, English for Speakers of Other Languages, English as a second or foreign language, or educational linguistics. These programs are known as MA or PhD programs in Applied Linguistics, Educational Linguistics, TESOL, TEFL, or TESL. The focus of most courses is on test development, psychometric qualities of tests, validity, reliability and fairness of tests, and classical true score theory. Additional courses focus on item response theory, factor analysis, structural equation modeling, g-theory, latent growth modeling, qualitative analysis of test performance data such as conversation and discourse analysis, and politics and language policy issues.