IN CONVERSATION

Asian Association for Language Assessment
Student Committee
Issue 3(Spring/Summer 2017)

CONTENTS

Editors' Note

Welcome to our 3rd *In Conversation* series!

A publication by students, from students and for students, the *In Conversation* series of the Student Committee (SC) of the Asian Association for Language Assessment (AALA) continues to live up to its mandate of engaging postgraduate students specializing in language assessment. Consequently, this issue opens with a dyad with one of the founding members and the current president of the AALA, Professor David Qian of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Our interaction with him touches on various aspects of his career trajectory and provides ideas relevant for the professional development of SC members.

This issue also contains an overview of the 4th International Conference of the AALA held in Taipei, Taiwan. And it captures, at a glance, some of the Conference's highlights, including the keynote address and plenary speeches as well as the active role of SC members at the Conference. We end this issue by placing the spotlight on the student award winners at the 2017 AALA Conference.

It is our hope that this 3rd issue of the *In Conversation* series will provide SC members with an insightful reading experience. To end on a personal note, we are gratefully thankful to the SC for the opportunity to be editors of this issue. The 4th issue promises to be a gripping one, including an interview with a renowned language assessment specialist, Professor Alister Cumming of the University of Toronto, so do look forward to it.

Let's continue to connect and engage! Let's continue to have meaningful conversations!

Thank you.

Kind regards,

Lin Lin & Mark Nartey (Editors)

Up-close with Professor David Qian, a Doyen of Language Assessment

In this issue of the *In Conversation* series, we take a sneak peek into the illustrious career of Professor David Qian. An academic colossus, a language specialist and an award-winning applied linguist, Prof. Qian has distinguished himself as one of the most respected and prominent scholars in the field of language assessment. We had the honor of interacting with him and have recounted this interview below. By engaging with Prof. Qian's interview, we hope that Student Committee members will be able to draw inspiration from this academic giant and aim for the stars in their own pursuits.

Q: How did it all start with your interest in language assessment and your engagement in that field?

I was first appointed to teach English at a university in the late 1970s. This year marks the 40th anniversary of my teaching career. During the 40 years, I have taught over 5,000 students by estimation. My interest in language assessment began in the late 1980s when I became the Director of the Foreign Language Center at the University of Science and Technology of China (USTC), following the completion of a two-year research fellowship in applied linguistics and lexicography at the University of Exeter, UK. At the USTC, I directed a team for developing and managing a number of English language tests for the University and the Chinese Academy of Sciences. My Center was also commissioned to administer high-stakes national and international tests, such as TOEFL and EPT. It was in such a context that I perceived a need for better understanding language assessment as a science and a profession. I, thus, developed a strong interest in language assessment.

Professor David Qian

Department of English

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Q: What in your estimation equipped or propelled you for your academic trajectory of exceptional quality?

I love to research into new areas, especially with an interdisciplinary nature. I guess it is this love that motivates me to look for new topics.

Q: You are an award-winning applied linguist and indubitably an accomplished scholar. What in your opinion is the highlight of your illustrious career thus far?

While I spent most of my career time teaching, research is inevitably an important part of my professional life. There are a few milestones that make me pleased: I have so far successfully completed over 25 projects worth over 6. 3 million dollars research grants, had over 90 refereed publications and spoken at more than 80 international conferences. All this has been accomplished in addition to my regular employment workload as a frontline teacher and an administrator. For many years, I was responsible for directing two large-size degree programs at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. I also created the Work-integrated Education (WIE) Program for the

Department of English in 2006 and served as its Program Coordinator until 2011. WIE has been a graduation requirement for all PolyU undergraduate students since 2006. This responsibility required me to source work placements for over 80 undergraduates annually in the Department and also to evaluate their work performances. Meanwhile, I have served on over 20 standing committees at PolyU and beyond, including the University Senate, University Academic Regulations Committee, Board of the Faculty of Humanities, Department Staffing Committee, Department Research Committee, and Department Head Search Committee. These were all heavy-duty administrative responsibilities which ate deeply into my precious research time.

Q: Most of your research is related to vocabulary assessment and acquisition. Could you share with us how research in this area has matured over the years? What are the important topics on which future research should focus?

When I wrote term papers on vocabulary assessment or acquisition in the early 1990s as a graduate student, I could comfortably begin a paper with a statement like "there is a paucity in vocabulary research" to justify a topic, but not anymore. Today there are so many published studies on vocabulary assessment and acquisition. As an indication, my early publications on vocabulary assessment and acquisition have now been cited in about 2,000 published vocabulary studies, according to Google Scholar. Nowadays, it is hard to identify a research niche in this area for an original study even though to say the field is "over-researched" may be an overstatement to describe the state of vocabulary research. However, the main issue to me is that, while there are so many published studies on vocabulary, few have made breakthroughs or contributed meaningfully to new knowledge. Many interesting studies were unfortunately weakened by design flaws, thus affecting internal validity. There is also a need for updating existing theories in vocabulary acquisition. If you want me to suggest a worthy direction for future vocabulary research, I'd love to see how the availability of mobile electronic gadgets facilitates vocabulary acquisition and whether established theories of vocabulary acquisition can still stand to the test in today's fast developing mobile phone age in which APPs for early learning are easily obtainable.

> *"I'd love to see how the availability of mobile electronic gadgets facilitates vocabulary acquisition and whether established theories of vocabulary acquisition can still stand to the test in today's fast developing mobile phone age in which APPs for early learning are easily obtainable."*

Q: You spent your postdoc years at ETS where you completed two TOEFL 2000 research projects. How was your working experience for those two projects? What kind of impact did such a wonderful experience have on your subsequent career?

My postdoctoral fellowship at ETS was highly worthwhile and has become an important milestone in my career. I had two very supportive mentors at ETS, Dr. Irwin Kirsch and Dr. Carol Taylor, who were the Director and Associate Director of the TOEFL 2000 Program respectively. I received intensive training in various ways in this excellent context. My research career benefits a lot from the skills I acquired at ETS, especially in writing effective research proposals and managing large-scale research projects.

Q: What motivated you to extend your interest in assessment and evaluation within education to professional contexts? How did your interest in communication in professional workplace emerge?

The Research Centre for Professional Communication in English (RCPCE) was established in January 2006 for the synergy of research expertise of colleagues interested in professional communication at Hong Kong PolyU. I was elected the Centre's founding Deputy Director and served in this position until December 2016. As its Deputy Director, I contributed my knowledge and skills in language assessment and corpus linguistics to several RCPCE projects that evaluated the role of English language in communication in professional workplaces in Hong Kong. Some of my publications were based on research findings from those projects.

Q: We have noticed that you began to do research on alternative assessments in recent years. How did you get interested in and involved with these classroom-based assessments?

At PolyU, I primarily teach courses in research methods, language assessment, psycholinguistics, and corpus linguistics in recent years. My students, especially those taking postgraduate teacher-training courses, often want to know more about how to conduct effective learning-oriented assessments in their classrooms. This prompted me to look deep into alternative assessment, which I actually found fascinating and useful. It is professionally fulfilling when I am able to apply my own research results to teaching in this area.

Q: Since you did some studies on teacher-based alternative assessment, what challenges do you think we face with the shift from assessment of learning to assessment for learning? What kind of support could our language testing researchers provide for teachers and students?

I am pleased to see that the concept of learning-oriented assessment has been increasingly embraced by researchers and practitioners in language assessment in recent years, but there is still a tension between the belief in traditional testing and that in alternative assessment, especially concerning the criteria for evaluating the quality of assessment tools and results and related research output. It is important for assessment professionals to be aware, and to accept, that a paradigm shift is well underway as regards how alternative assessments should be viewed, and for that matter, how research output on alternative assessments should be evaluated. However, it is usually more difficult for researchers to get their work on alternative assessment published than on mainstream testing. One possible reason is that some manuscript reviewers still apply traditional standards to judge manuscripts in alternative assessment. As a result, manuscripts on alternative assessment can be rejected simply on the ground that they lack reliability data or the design of the study does not match mainstream frameworks for developing language tests. It is therefore imperative that alternative assessment research is assessed based on criteria that are suitable for such purposes.

Q: Which research projects are you currently working on?

I am engaged in a variety of topics. I have been studying how corpus linguistics can contribute to the development of large-scale and classroom-based assessments. Such research involves both

quantitative and qualitative analyses. I recently completed a large-scale corpus project commissioned by ETS, involving analysis of discourse moves and patterns in academic activities. Other topics I am currently working on include dynamic assessment and reviewing the state of research on the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and language proficiency.

Q: Please recount any memorable experience in your career to us.

Attending international conferences is both fun and professionally benefitting. Some great conferences, such as the Language Testing Research Colloquium and the annual conference of the Asian Association for Language Assessment, have given me many fond memories. I had the pleasure of meeting many world-renowned authors at those conferences, where I renew old friendships and form new ones. I still remember chatting happily over meals with leading researchers in applied linguistics such as Lyle Bachman, Alister Cumming, Alan Davies, Rod Ellis, John Read, Cyril Weir, and many others during various conferences.

Q: Could you share with us some of the challenges you've had to navigate as a young academic cutting his teeth?

Finding academic mentors who are not only supportive but also recognized in the research community is important for young academics, such that young academics can "stand on the shoulders of giants" in moving forward professionally. This is especially important for start-up academics in identifying worthy research niches and establishing initial professional network.

Q: We know some large language testing and research organizations offer internships and postdoctoral fellowships. As a researcher who has had such experience, could you give some suggestions to postgraduate students or young scholars who are interested in these opportunities?

Internships and postdoctoral fellowships are important training opportunities for doctoral students. In addition to conducting their own search for such information, another important source of information on such opportunities should be their own dissertation supervisors. My supervisor provided me with useful leads so that I was eventually able to win the TOEFL 2000 Postdoctoral Fellowship, which became an important milestone in my career. A supportive and resourceful supervisor can be a lifetime mentor beyond the doctoral experience.

Q: As a member of the editorial board of several top-tier international journals, could you provide some tips for AALA student members who would like to get their articles published?

Publishing in top-tier journals is critical for doctoral students who are looking for faculty positions, but they need to be aware they are actually competing with faculty members for those journal pages because serving faculty members are also looking to publishing in such outlets in order to be promoted or tenured. Due to the limited number of high-impact journals and a much larger number of potential contributors, getting published in top-ranking journals, such as SSCI-indexed journals, has become extremely difficult. In my view, while the quality of the study being reported and the ability to write excellent research articles are important traits for the success, perseverance can help make a difference. Don't be frustrated and give it up when your manuscript comes back with critical, or even disheartening, comments from the reviewers. As long as the editor allows you a chance of

resubmitting, there is a ray of hope. Often, it is not the editor who throws out your manuscript; it is the author that gives it up.
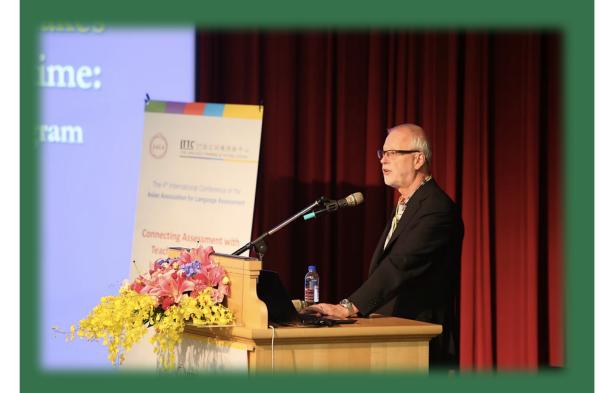
> *"Don't be frustrated and give it up when your manuscript comes back with critical, or even disheartening, comments from the reviewers. As long as the editor allows you a chance of resubmitting, there is a ray of hope. Often, it is not the editor who throws out your manuscript: it is the author that gives it up."*

2017 AALA Conference Summary

The 4th International Conference of the Asian Association for Language Assessment (AALA) was held from June 21 to June 23 2017 at The Language Training and Testing Center (LTTC) in Taipei, Taiwan. The theme for the Conference was "Connecting Assessment with Teaching and Learning: Innovation and Impact" and it was attended by more than 130 academics and professionals from 18 different countries across the globe. Comprising five keynote and plenary speeches, three pre-conference workshops, 53 paper presentations and 25 poster presentations, the Conference provided participants with an appropriate platform to explore relevant issues within language assessment, including assessment practices, qualities of assessments and new concerns arising from innovative assessment tools and methods.

Conference group photo (Photo credit: LTTC)

Some of the Conference's highlights are briefly presented. Professor Alister Cumming from University of Toronto delivered his keynote address on purposing writing assessments. Professor Yuko Goto Butler, Professor Sebastian Liao, Dr. Nick Saville and Professor Benson Yeh presented individual speeches on topics covering self-assessment for young learners, localization of language tests from a cultural perspective, learning oriented assessment and peer-to-peer learning and assessment. These presentations and the ones delivered at the parallel sessions engendered fruitful discussions between presenters and attendees. Another highlight of the conference was the presentation of the Best Student Paper Award to Ms. Lin Rongchan from Teachers College, Columbia University, and the Best Student Poster Award to Ms. Kana Matsumura from Waseda University.

Prof. Alister Cumming delivered the keynote speech (Photo credit: LTTC)

It is worth mentioning that four of our student committee members attended the Conference and played active roles. For instance, Carol and Rongchan discussed student-related matters at the annual Executive Board Meeting subsequent to which Rongchan shared some of these student-related issues with Matthew at the General Membership Meeting. These issues included student conference awards, funding opportunities for student members, the biannual student newsletter (In Conversation) and the impending call for nomination for AALA Student Committee (2018-2019). Xiaohua and Matthew also organized the student networking session to promote knowledge exchange and professional development among graduate students.

Student participants with EB members at the student networking lunch

All said, the 4th International Conference of the AALA was an overall success, as it was effectively organized, well attended and intellectually stimulating.

Group photo of EB and SC members at reception dinner
Left to right: Prof. Jin Yan, Prof. Antony John Kunnan, Ms. Carol Dabarera (front), Prof. David Qian (back), Prof. Jessica Wu (front), Dr. Matthew Wallace (back), Ms. Lin Rongchan (front), and Mr. Liu Xiaohua (back)

Words from 2017 AALA Conference Student Award Winners

Best Student Paper Award:

Ms. Lin Rongchan
Teachers College, Columbia University

Hi everyone! I am Rongchan, a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University. My research interests include assessment policies, integrated assessment, and scenario-based assessment (SBA).

I am very lucky and honored to have won the 2017 AALA Best Student Paper Award. My paper focused on the operationalization of content integration in the analytic scoring of test-takers' listening-speaking ability in Chinese. Adopting a modified SBA framework (see O'Reilly & Sabatini, 2013, on SBA), I designed a test that comprised two retell tasks and an oral presentation situated in an academic context. I used multivariate generalizability theory and many-facet Rasch measurement to analyze my data and found that the ability to integrate content into discourse appeared to be a unique attribute of listening-speaking ability compared to the other dimensions, namely organization, delivery and language control. Consequently, I concluded that it is meaningful to operationalize content integration as an independent dimension in the analytic rubric in order to better reflect the construct of listening-speaking ability. Through this work, I hope to emphasize the importance of scoring for content, and to echo the stance that we should reprioritize meaningfulness over wellformedness in second language assessment (Purpura, 2017). Hopefully, my study would shed light on how the ability to integrate content into discourse could be measured reliably and elucidate the construct of listening-speaking ability.

I am indebted to my advisor, Professor James Purpura, for his guidance and encouragement. His thought-provoking comments on my study have sharpened my thinking greatly. I am also thankful to my peers at Teachers College for spurring me on to complete my study. I would also like to thank Professor Yuanman Liu and Mr. Mingming Shao at Peking University for their help and support. Additionally, I am extremely grateful to Confucius Institute Headquarters for awarding me the Confucius China Studies Program Joint Research Ph.D. Fellowship. Their generous funding allowed me to carry out my research and learn from experts in China.

Last but not least, I would like to thank AALA for organizing such an awesome conference in Taipei. I enjoyed interacting with experts and peers from all over the world at the conference. The conference has given me a valuable platform, a new challenge and, most importantly, a fresh perspective on language assessment. Kudos to the organizing committee!

Best Student Poster Award:

Hello AALA student members, I am Kana Matsumura. I am extremely honored to have won the Best Student Poster Award this year. I am very happy to share my story in this issue.

I am a PhD student at Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan. Professor Yasuyo Sawaki is my supervisor. My current research interest is EFL assessment in the classroom context; an interest motivated by the fact that I have been teaching in high school as an English teacher for more than 15 years. I earned my master's degree in English linguistics in 1988 (the topic of my thesis was a discourse analysis with Echo Utterance). I decided three years ago to return to academia and that was how I enrolled onto the PhD program at Waseda – in life, you cannot be absolutely certain of the future, so you must always seize an opportunity when it comes your way!

Ms. Kana Matsumura
Graduate School of Education
Waseda University

Let me introduce my research study that won the Best Student Poster Award. I decided to conduct this research because English writing instructions in Japanese high school is not very successful and one of the biggest challenges lies in the difficulty in assessing the content and the structure of learners' written products. Moreover, English language teachers (including myself) are not sure how to provide feedback to learners on the content and structure. My study, therefore, set out to offer diagnostic feedback on argumentative essays of Japanese high school students with a rating scale mainly consisting of Yes/No binary decisions that I developed based on the Toulmin model of argument (1958, 2003). The scale displays the process of evaluation and provides students with diagnostic feedback on a series of features pertaining to their writing.

Again, I am honored to have won the award and I would want to seize this opportunity to express special thanks to my supervisor for her invaluable advice and suggestions. Finally, I would like to give a word to the AALA student members (and to myself working hard on my doctoral dissertation): "Never say never!"

AALA Founding Members (in alphabetical order)

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

AALA Executive Board (2016-2017)

President
David Qian (Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong)
Co-President
Jessica Wu (Language Training and Testing Center, Taiwan)
1st Vice President
Yan Jin (Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China)
2nd Vice President
Jirada Wudthayagorn (Chulalongkorn University, Thailand)
Immediate Past President
Antony John Kunnan (University of Macau, Macau)
Secretary/Treasurer
Yasuyo Sawaki (Waseda University, Japan)
Communications Officer
Yasuhiro Imao (Osaka University, Japan)
Members at Large
Lianzhen He (Zhejiang University, China)
Young Shik Lee (Hannam University, South Korea)

AALA Student Committee (2015-2017)

Advisor
Yan Jin (Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China)
Co-chairs
Rongchan Lin (Columbia University, USA)
Sha Liu (University of Bristol, UK)
Secretary
Carol Dabarera (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)
Treasurer
Xiaohua Liu (The University of Auckland, New Zealand)
Public Relations Officer
Lin Lin (The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong)
Committee Members
Junghee Byun (Seoul National University, South Korea),
Matthew Wallace (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)

Committee Contact Information

AALA Website:
http://www.aalawebsite.com/

Email: aalastudent@hotmail.com

Facebook Page: https://www.facebook.com/aalastudentcommittee/

Facebook Group:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/AALAStudentGroup/

LinkedIn:
https://www.linkedin.com/groups/6941774/profile

AALA Student Committee In Conversation Series

Issue 3 (Spring/ Summer 2017)

Editors: Lin Lin & Mark Nartey