

toring, problem identification, and selective attention appeared to be the significant factor distinguishing the successful from the less successful listener. Differences for gender were minimal, and differences for learning style were inconclusive. A qualitative analysis of representative protocols also pointed to the integral role of metacognitive strategies, as well as differences in the use of prior knowledge, inferencing, prediction skills, and monitoring. Results are discussed in the light of information-processing theory; and the paper concludes with pedagogical implications.

98-410 Vandergrift, Laurens (U. of Ottawa). The Cinderella of communication strategies: reception strategies in interactive listening. *The Modern Language Journal* (Madison, WI), **81**, 4 (1997), 494–505.

Interactive listening plays an important role in language learning. Specifically, the effective use of reception strategies by listeners in interaction can both resolve immediate comprehension problems and facilitate long-term language learning. The study reported here investigated the types of reception strategies and the frequency of their use by students of French aged 16 and 17 at different levels of language proficiency, measured by an oral proficiency interview as designed by ACTFL/ETS (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages/Educational Testing Service). A number of distinct strategies were identified. Students with novice-level proficiency made greater use of kinesics, global reprises, and hypothesis testing in English to clarify meaning or solicit further input. Students with intermediate-level proficiency also used these strategies, but less frequently and in qualitatively different ways. In addition, they more often used the strategy of uptaking. Results are discussed in the light of cognitive and social constraints; and pedagogical implications are presented.

98-411 Yuan, Boping (U. of Cambridge). Asymmetry of null subjects and null objects in Chinese speakers' L2 English. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* (New York), **19**, 4 (1997), 467–97.

One of the differences between Chinese and English is that the former allows both null subjects in finite sentences and null objects, but the latter allows neither. This cross-linguistic variation is believed to be related to the underspecification of I and topic drop in Chinese but not in English. This paper reports on an empirical study investigating the unlearning of null subjects and null objects by 159 Chinese learners in their second language (L2) acquisition of English. In first language (L1) acquisition, it has been found that English-speaking children display an asymmetry by frequently allowing null subjects but rarely null objects. The results of this study indicate that there is an asymmetry in Chinese learners' L2 English, which, however, is opposite to that found in English L1 acquisition: Chinese learners are able to reject the incorrect null subject in English, but unable to detect the ungrammaticality of the null object. It is proposed that the unlearning

of null subjects by Chinese learners of English is triggered by the evidence in their input indicating the specification of AGR(ement) and T(ense) in English, and that the difficulty in the unlearning of null objects is related to the lack of informative evidence to unset the [+ topic-drop] setting in Chinese learners' L2 English.

Language testing

98-412 Davies, Alan (U. of Edinburgh / U. of Melbourne). Demands of being professional in language testing. *Language Testing* (London), **14**, 3 (1997), 328–39.

The need for a strong ethical foundation in the social sciences, which include language testing, is discussed. It is suggested that such a foundation can be developed through the process of 'professionalising'. The need for a professional morality in addition to public and individual moralities is proposed, and the importance of a professional morality to individual members and to other stakeholders is explained: professions establish contact with the public and at the same time must protect their members. The intrusive nature of language testing research and the normative role of language tests raise ethical questions regarding professional practice. Critical approaches to language testing expose the importance of carefully examining alternative assessment proposals and of making clear the validity of the assessment methods used by the profession. Given the weakness of sanctions for a social science profession such as language testing, what members are now doing is creating an 'ethical milieu' through professional training and professional activities—forming an association, establishing journals and WWW pages, issuing codes of practice, developing qualifications—thereby making explicit the public engagement of members in a common task. Such explicitness is taken to show both the reach and the limits of the profession's morality.

98-413 Elder, Cathie (U. of Melbourne). What does test bias have to do with fairness? *Language Testing* (London), **14**, 3 (1997), 261–77.

This article reports on the issue of bias in school examinations as it affects languages other than English (LOTE) learners from different first language backgrounds. Statistical methods for detecting test bias claim to be ethically neutral, in that they do no more than demonstrate whether or not there are systematic discrepancies in test performance across groups. However, they leave unanswered the question of whether the criterion adopted as benchmark for group comparisons is fair. The determination of whether a test, or parts of a test, are biased depends ultimately on how the test construct is defined (and on who is defining it). What may appear to be an instance of bias or distortion in the measurement process may, on closer analysis, turn out to be an indication of real differences in the ability which the test aims to measure. This issue is discussed with reference to a scheme introduced in the Victorian State of

Australia to compensate foreign language learners for alleged bias in favour of those with a home background in the target language on the Year 12 Victorian Certificate of Education examinations in LOTE.

98-414 Gervais, Chantel (U. of Lincolnshire and Humberside). Computers and language testing: a harmonious relationship? *Francophonie (Rugby)*, **16** (1997), 3–7.

This article examines the transferral of a diagnostic 'paper' test, comprising grammar, vocabulary and comprehension sections, to a computerised, on-line format. A problem with validity seemed to arise if the original test was modified to accommodate a number of information technology constraints. The electronic version was apparently less flexible: it could not cope, for example, with the unpredictability of the order of students' answers in some test items. There were also procedural problems related to the practical operation of the computer network at the University. On the basis of student comments, however, the new test seemed to be highly motivating, especially as it could give students immediate feedback on their scores. It is felt that, on balance, the computerised test was less cumbersome and easier to administer, though the element of 'guessing' typically associated with multiple-choice items could be a potential problem, which the author avoided by minimising the number of such items. It is concluded that effective language proficiency assessment could not rely totally on computerised methods (and the associated 'all or nothing' approach), but would have to allow for an element of open-ended responses and subjective evaluation.

98-415 Hamp-Lyons, Liz (Hong Kong Poly. U.). Washback, impact and validity: ethical concerns. *Language Testing* (London), **14**, 3 (1997), 295–303.

For many years it was asserted that language tests had a negative impact on teaching and thereby on learning and learners. This impact has become widely known in language testing as 'washback' ('backwash'). 'Washback' is one of a set of terms then that have been used in general education, language education and language testing to refer to a set of beliefs about the relationship between testing and teaching and learning. A theory of washback is now emerging, and its domain being delineated. In this article the theory of washback is linked with the broader concept of 'impact' in educational measurement, and thence to the recent debate on construct validity associated with Messick.

98-416 Hawthorne, Leslyanne (U. of Melbourne). The political dimension of English language testing in Australia. *Language Testing* (London), **14**, 3 (1997), 248–60.

The past decade has coincided with the increasing use of English language testing in Australia for non-linguistic purposes, frequently in contexts governed by significant political pressures. This article explores two recent examples: the *access* test (Australian Assessment of

Communicative English Skills), a form of English as a Second Language (ESL) testing seen as designed actively to regulate the flow of skilled migrants to Australia; and the *step* test (Special Test of English Proficiency), a test ostensibly designed to assess linguistic competence, but in fact, according to the author of this article, structured to play a central role in the determination of asylum seekers' residential status. The article explores the pragmatic considerations which can give rise to such test development; and concludes that, since macropolitical pressures can have a profound impact on test design, administration and outcomes, they warrant detailed ethical consideration from applied linguists.

98-417 Li, K. C. (The Open U., Hong Kong). The labyrinth of exit standard controls. *Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics* (Hong Kong), **2**, 1 (1997), 23–38.

In view of mounting dissatisfaction with graduates' language proficiency, tertiary institutions in Hong Kong are seriously considering adopting exit controls over their students' language proficiency. There are three parts to this paper. The first part outlines major theoretical issues involved in implementing any such controls. These issues include the indeterminacy of the targets for controls and the question of how such targets can be controlled. The second part attempts to offer an overview of the major practical issues: possible means of implementation are outlined and their key pros and cons are compared. By delineating the complexity of the major issues involved, the first two parts highlight the fact that institutions should answer a large number of important, yet difficult, questions before proceeding to control their graduates' exit language proficiency. The third part presents four approaches that may help overcome the difficulties in implementing exit controls: these are taking the bull by the horns, accepting a plurality of practices, focusing on communication, and producing different results for different audiences.

98-418 Lynch, Brian K. (U. of Melbourne). In search of the ethical test. *Language Testing* (London), **14**, 3 (1997), 315–27.

The central question addressed in this paper is whether any test can be defended as ethical, or moral. Ethicality is defined in terms of issues such as harm, consent, confidentiality of data and fairness. Frameworks for determining equity of educational opportunity are presented and discussed. A statewide assessment project in Victoria, Australia—the Learning Assessment Project—is then examined in relation to these concerns, and the possibility of more ethical approaches to testing is considered.

98-419 Norton, Bonny (U. of British Columbia) and **Starfield, Sue**. Covert language assessment in academic writing. *Language Testing* (London), **14**, 3 (1997), 278–94.

In this article 'covert' language assessment refers to the implicit assessment of non-native speaking and writing

that takes place when the focus of the assessment is on an examinee's understanding of an academic subject such as geography, history, biology or physics, and not on the examinee's language proficiency as such. Drawing on a larger study of assessment practices at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, the authors claim to demonstrate that there was in some cases a lack of clarity in the extent to which proficiency in written English was taken into account in the assessment of the academic writing of second language students at the university. It is argued that, if universities are to be accountable to students, the criteria used in the assessment of assignments and examinations should be made explicit. More specifically, second language students need to know to what extent their performance on academic writing tasks is determined by the quality of their ideas and the quality of their written expression—notwithstanding the complex relationship between them. Recommendations are made for the assessment of students in tertiary institutions with multilingual student populations.

98-420 Rea-Dickins, Pauline (U. of Warwick). So, why do we need relationships with stakeholders in language testing? A view from the UK. *Language Testing* (London), **14**, 3 (1997), 304–14.

The need to consult stakeholders and to take seriously their views is a repeated theme in recent discussions of language testing. Stakeholders are identified as those who make decisions and those who are affected by those decisions. Such a definition makes the range of possible stakes in assessment and testing very wide. These 'stakes' are categorised in terms of text research and development functions, curriculum innovation and implementation, and accountability functions. This article examines some of the contributions that stakeholders such as learners, teachers and parents have in the assessment process. It also examines the relationship between experts and government. Participation by stakeholders is not limited to providing a forum for stakeholders to express their views but is also about equipping teachers, parents and others with information so that they may take appropriate action. In this way a stakeholder approach to assessment has the effect of democratising assessment processes, of improving relationships between those involved, and thereby of promoting greater fairness.

98-421 Shohamy, Elana (Tel Aviv U.). Testing methods, testing consequences: are they ethical? Are they fair? *Language Testing* (London), **14**, 3 (1997), 340–9.

Recently, there has been a growing awareness of issues of bias, fairness and ethicality in language testing. Language tests employing methods which are not fair to all test takers are deemed unethical. Equally, uses of language tests which aim to exercise control and manipulate stakeholders rather than provide information regarding proficiency levels are also seen as unethi-

cal. This article discusses ways of reducing these sources of unfairness; and language testers are urged to exercise vigilance at all times to ensure that the tests they develop are democratic and fair.

98-422 Spolsky, Bernard (Bar Ilan U.). The ethics of gatekeeping tests: what have we learned in a hundred years? *Language Testing* (London), **14**, 3 (1997), 242–7.

Tests and examinations have always been used as a means of political and social control. Critics have emphasised their unfairness and what Edgeworth called their 'unavoidable uncertainty'. The concern of this article is not with the controlling purpose of tests, in the sense of their power to take over the syllabus and direct what happens in the classroom, but with the gatekeeping function itself, the use of examination results to determine qualifications for positions or for training for positions. Test results are claimed to be unreliable, especially at the extremes, and their predictive power weak. It is argued that language testers need above all to be sceptical; they should insist that the most complete information about candidates be made available for selection decision-making.

Teacher education

98-423 Ainscough, Valerie (Hilderstone Coll., Canterbury, UK). Reflection in action: increasing teacher awareness of the learning needs of specific socio-cultural groups. *System* (Oxford), **25**, 4 (1997), 571–9.

In the current debate concerning the importance of socio-cultural context in English Language Teaching in relation to teaching styles and methodology, this paper looks at a systematic approach to in-service teacher development using reflective approaches as a tool to focus on the appropriacy of teaching styles. The extent of the need for awareness-raising is first examined, not only in relation to learner backgrounds but also from the perspective of teachers' varying experiences of teaching and training. Each member of a teaching team comes to the classroom with certain preconceptions about the nature of language learning and the learning styles of the students themselves. Such preconceptions can be both instrumental and detrimental to the teaching process. The paper looks briefly at the issue of appropriate methodology for differing socio-cultural contexts, and asks to what extent learner differences are dependent on, or unrelated to, cultural background, and how this might be discovered. The theoretical basis for reflective practice in teacher training is linked to in-service teacher development as a means of focusing on the needs of a particular cultural group. A practical application of linking theory to practice is then outlined. The article is based on the experiences of a team of 16 teachers drawn from a wide variety of teaching backgrounds, working with monolingual (Japanese) students in Britain.