

Book Review
***Practical Language Testing* by Glenn Fulcher**

Suthatip Thirakunkovit
Faculty of Liberal Arts
Mahidol University
withbone@hotmail.com

Practical Language Testing is Professor Glenn Fulcher's book published in 2010. The concise summary of the book can be found from the back-cover blurb as "the ideal introduction for students of Applied Linguistics and Modern Foreign Language teaching as well as for practicing teachers who are required to design or implement language tests." As the blurb suggests, this book can be an ideal introduction for test developers or students who are interested in the field of language testing because it provides the readers with practical knowledge necessary for developing language tests.

The first chapter provides an overview of the field of language testing from historical and philosophical perspectives. Fulcher has truly explored the history of the field in depth – it is much beyond what some of us already know. For example, he mentions the testing practices in selecting the scholar officials in China, which later influenced Europe and the whole civil service examination system in the United States during the Nineteenth Century. Moreover, in discussing some of the test's history, Fulcher's viewpoints make the readers aware of the impact or unintended consequences that can happen after a test is operationalized. In order to make the right decisions, Fulcher states that it is important for language professionals to ask questions: What is the purpose of the test, why the test is being used and how should it be used, and how might the test have an impact on society or to the test takers who cannot perform at the expected level?

Chapters 2 and 3 deal with large-scale standardized testing and classroom assessments respectively. Fulcher starts off both chapters by mentioning the major assumptions underlying both paradigms so that the readers can see where the theories and practices are coming from. To be more specific, in Chapter 2, Fulcher reviews the basic knowledge of statistics used in the field of language testing and explains the statistical procedures necessary for demonstrating a test's reliability and validity. The differences between norm-referenced testing and criterion-referenced testing are firstly reviewed. Then Fulcher explains the basic concepts of descriptive statistics of the mean, mode, median, and standard deviation, shapes of score distributions, test item difficulty and item discrimination, etc. Fulcher also illustrates how different correlation coefficients (for example, Pearson product moment, Cronbach's alpha, Spearman Brown) can be interpreted, and he also discussed their important underlying assumptions. Chapter 3, Classroom Assessment, has a similar chapter organization to that of Chapter 2. Fulcher first investigates where the theories of classroom assessment and practices originated, and then examines some statistical procedures commonly used during test review processes.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 can be thought of as the core of the book because they provide the readers with the essential knowledge for developing a test. Each chapter

clearly outlines step-by-step instructions on how to develop a language test. Chapter 4 illustrates different stages of the test development cycle, starting from defining the test purpose and construction, to making decisions about test scores. Each stage is extended by examples from particular testing situations. Chapter 5 presents the definition of test specifications with a sample of detailed test specification for a reading test. Chapter 6 provides guidelines of test evaluation, including testing piloting and test reviewing. In this chapter, Fulcher carefully answers the question of what makes good test items. Chapter 7 contains a discussion of test scoring, which includes both traditional item scoring methods and automated scoring methods that have become popular. Chapter 8 specifically provides directions on how to align the test with other standard measures such as CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), and Chapter 9 covers the instructions on how to manage test administration. With clear visual illustrations and examples provided in these chapters, Fulcher should be highly commended for making the test development process more accessible to the people who are new to the field of language testing.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 10, the readers return to the discussion in classroom settings. The chapter covers important issues of testing in a teaching context such as wash-back from a test upon learning and teaching. Since a test is a complex social phenomenon, and it can change one's life, Fulcher suggests several ways teachers and test developers can help students prepare for a test.

Another positive feature of this book is the question section at the end of each chapter. Many of the questions are not just the practices that ask the readers to apply the knowledge presented in each chapter. Rather, they encourage the readers to think carefully about testing in their own contexts and explore the issues further by applying those concepts and ideas.

With different aspects of each chapter, this book can be a valuable, excellent choice for use in language testing classrooms. Throughout the book, Fulcher has included examples from real testing situations. Many of these are good examples that we can emulate. The book can absolutely enrich the readers with clear understanding of the issues, theories, and practices in the field of language testing. After reading the book, the readers should be able to become more realistic about the test development process and be able to make fair decisions about the use and implementation of tests in their own contexts.

About the author:

Professor Fulcher is a professor at the University of Lancaster, UK. Due to his numerous articles and books, he has become a well-respected scholar in the field of language testing. To learn more about Professor Fulcher's involvement in the field, please visit his website: <http://languagetesting.info>.

Reference:

Fulcher, G. (2010). *Practical Language Testing*. London: Hodder Education.