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Edited by Evelina D. Galaczi and Cyril J. Weir

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Proceedings of the ALTE Kraków
Conference, July 2011

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Series Editors' note

ALTE, the Association of Language Testers in Europe, includes many of the world's leading language assessment bodies among its 33 members. Together with over 50 affiliates, ALTE members represent the testing of 26 European languages. Founded in 1990 by the universities of Salamanca and Cambridge, ALTE has grown to become one of the most important bodies within the language assessment profession. ALTE celebrated 20 years of achievement with the ALTE 4th International Conference in Kraków, Poland in July 2011, providing a fitting finale to this important milestone for the association.

In its work to promote common standards and the transnational recognition of language skills certification, ALTE has done much to encourage quality and fairness in language testing. The development of ALTE's Code of Practice and Quality Management System are key highlights in the organisation's history, as are the previous ALTE conferences held in Cambridge, Berlin and Barcelona. ALTE Kraków 2011 provided an opportunity to review these and other achievements, and to look forward to future initiatives that will further support multilingualism and professional development.

ALTE Kraków 2011 was hosted by the Jagiellonian University and built upon the success of the three previous ALTE international conferences: the first, held in Barcelona in July 2001, hosted by the Generalitat de Catalunya, on the theme of 'European Language Testing in a Global Context' to celebrate the European Year of Languages; the second, held in Berlin in May 2005, hosted by the Goethe-Institut, on the theme of 'Language Assessment in a Multilingual Context' to support the 50th Anniversary of the European Cultural Convention; and the third, held in Cambridge in April 2008, hosted by University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL), which focused on the theme of 'The Social and Educational Impact of Language Assessment'. Edited proceedings from these events were published as Volumes 18, 27 and 31 in the now well-established and highly regarded *Studies in Language Testing* series.

The theme of the ALTE 4th International Conference – 'The Impact of Language Frameworks on Assessment, Learning and Teaching, viewed from the perspectives of Policies, Procedures and Challenges' – reflected the growing importance attached to the use of frameworks in language testing practice and policy making.

ALTE international conferences are among the largest multilingual events for the global language assessment community. The 2011 conference

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was no exception, with over 100 presenters, and plenary and keynote speakers representing some of the leading voices in the field, including Professor Lyle Bachman, Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of California, and Professor Elana Shohamy, Chair of the Language Education Programme at the School of Education, Tel Aviv University.

Well over 300 delegates attended from over 50 countries and regions around the world. It was also a multilingual event, with presentations in five of the many different languages represented at the conference, and it provided an opportunity for participants to hear influential voices, discuss key issues and meet colleagues from a variety of different backgrounds.

One of the highlights of the conference was the LAMI (Language Assessment for Migration and Integration) Forum, held under the auspices of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Thorbjørn Jagland. The theme of the forum – language testing and access – continued the discussions ALTE has been engaged in for a number of years relating to language testing in European migration policy but with a focus this time on the notion of access, in its literal and figurative meanings, and the implications for assessment. In recent years, increasing migration has led to more and more countries placing a greater emphasis on language ability for those wishing to apply for citizenship or as a requirement for obtaining a visa to first enter a country to study, work or for family reasons. These recent developments clearly have important ethical and political implications with concerns of possible unfair discrimination related to issues of access, and in this context the forum contributed to the ongoing discussions about the role of language assessment for migration purposes by bringing together key stakeholders including policy makers, language educators and language testers.

The ALTE conference marked another important stage in ALTE's development since it was originally founded with eight members in 1990, primarily to work on common levels of proficiency and common standards for the language testing process. Europe thrives on diversity and it is the need to respect and value this diversity while at the same time trying to find common ground that binds us together. The event in Kraków was a great opportunity for delegates to participate in a conference that reflects the diversity of Europe and the importance we all place in languages, language learning, the certification of language competence and the significance of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages in the development of plurilingualism and intercultural competences. But improving mutual understanding is equally important in the wider global context. The event in Kraków was a gathering of assessment professionals focusing not only on professional matters in our field but also engaging positively in debate on language in a social, economic and political context. If our voices are to be heard then we need to participate positively. We also need the capacity to see things from a number of perspectives and in organising this conference, one of the main

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aims was to allow for the divergence of views, opinions and perceptions in order to help this process of building mutual understanding.

ALTE provides a forum where assessment professionals can work together effectively and there are two particular projects where ALTE members have been working together successfully in recent years. The first is in relation to the survey of language competences in Europe. The survey was first mooted in March 2002, as part of a European Council strategy to 'improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age'. Invitations to tender were issued in mid-2007 and SurveyLang, a consortium made up largely of ALTE members and led by Cambridge ESOL, was finally confirmed as the successful bidder in February 2008. The survey provides information on the general level of foreign language knowledge (in five languages: Italian, French, German, Spanish and English) of the pupils in 32 EU Member States and other participating countries. It provides strategic information to policy makers, teachers and learners in all surveyed countries and it is anticipated that the collected data from the survey will help policy makers, teachers and practitioners to take decisions about how to improve foreign language teaching methods and thus the performance of pupils in foreign languages. This is an enormously challenging but also potentially extremely useful project.

ALTE members are also working increasingly with national ministries of education to help provide high-quality language assessment. The Lingua 2000 project in Italy was a highly successful example of this work some years ago when the Italian government made great use of international language certification to help in the learning and teaching of languages in Italian schools. More recently, ALTE members – the Cervantes Institute, the Goethe-Institut and Cambridge ESOL – have been working with the French Ministry of Education to provide language testing materials that meet international standards and are linked to the CEFR.

While seeking opportunities for effective collaboration and conformity to standards of good practice, respecting and understanding our differences is a key aspect of ALTE's work. To advance these aims, ALTE has developed guidelines for the writing of test materials, ways of describing the content of examinations so that they can be compared more effectively, ALTE has built a framework of examinations that allows users to see how the different exams relate to each other and, importantly, members of ALTE have defined a multilingual glossary of language testing terms (developed and published in 10 languages in the late 1990s and now available in numerous additional languages). For instance, the latest edition was published in Basque in 2007, clearly demonstrating the sustainability of ALTE's work. Much of this work has been supported by funds provided by the European Commission through its Lingua programme, and much of it has been done in collaboration with the Council of Europe, which has played and continues to play such

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a significant role in language policy in Europe and now through the CEFR far beyond. All of this work is available on the ALTE website or from individual members of ALTE.

ALTE published its first international code of practice for language testing in 1994 and much work on refining this concept and documenting principles of good practice took place in the 1990s. Between 2000 and 2002 ALTE set up a Code of Practice Working Group which developed a Quality Management System leading to a Quality Auditing System that was piloted in 2005 and 2006 and introduced in 2007. ALTE has now audited most of its members on at least one of the examinations they provide. As a consequence of these developments, membership of ALTE is now based on demonstrating, through the Auditing System, that an organisation's examinations do conform to internationally recognised systems in a transparent and open way.

ALTE is in the process of developing web forums in English, French, German and Spanish in the first instance and we anticipate that the number of language forums will increase over the next few years. Within these, members will have access to the ALTE network, training materials, publications and training courses offered by ALTE throughout Europe on a relatively frequent basis.

One of ALTE's main aims is to share ideas and know-how, and events such as the ALTE 4th International Conference in Kraków provide an ideal opportunity for language teaching and testing professionals from around the world to meet and to pool expertise, and to consider together how best to resolve some of the important challenges facing society today. Not surprisingly, plans are already well in hand for ALTE's 5th International Conference to be held in Paris in April 2014.

As will be apparent, the conference papers presented here represent only a selection of the many excellent presentations made in Kraków which reflect a wide range of topics and concerns; they provide a flavour of the key themes addressed at the conference. The Introduction to this volume by Evelina Galaczi and Cyril Weir helps to highlight and summarise for readers the various strands that resonated throughout the conference, and points to important implications for the language testing community.

Cyril J Weir
Michael Milanovic

April 2012