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I would like to dedicate this book to Aki, who made it possible, as a token of my love and gratitude.

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Series Editors' Preface

The assessment of listening abilities is one of the least understood, least developed and yet one of the most important areas of language testing and assessment. It is important because of the potential wash-back effect onto classroom practices. After all, if we do not test the ability to understand spoken discourse in the second or foreign language, why would learners take seriously the need to develop and improve their listening comprehension? Even if teachers might be convinced of the importance of listening as a language-use activity, they will perhaps inevitably tend to concentrate on those specific aspects of listening that are eventually tested. Indeed, some have argued that it is crucial to test listening in settings where tests of speaking cannot be administered for practical and logistical reasons. The argument is that by teaching listening (in preparation for the test), teachers will necessarily have to engage in some sort of speaking activity in class, even if speaking itself is not assessed.

Thus, from a pedagogic point of view, the assessment of listening is central to our need to teach as well as to assess language proficiency.

It is all the more curious, therefore, that very little is written in the language assessment literature on the specific constructs, or abilities, that underlie listening, on how to go about designing listening assessment procedures, on how to validate and evaluate listening tests.

This book is therefore both timely and necessary. It represents a major addition to the language assessment literature, and is certain to be the standard reference work on the subject for years to come. We are confident in saying this, not simply because there is a clear need for the book, but also because it is written by an author who is one of the few true experts on the nature of listening. Dr Gary Buck's doctoral dissertation work on the testing of listening won the first TOEFL Award for Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Research on Second/

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Foreign Language Testing, in 1993. Dr Buck has since that time published a number of influential research articles on the topic. In addition to being an acknowledged expert in the field, he is also a very experienced language teacher, who has grappled for years with the problem of how to design suitable assessment procedures for classroom use as well as for larger scale proficiency tests. And, very importantly, he is able to write in a manner which is immediately accessible to practitioners as well as to researchers. Test-developers will find his account of the nature of listening clear, revealing, up-to-date, and of immense value in designing language tests. Classroom teachers interested in improving their tests of listening ability will find in the book very helpful advice on how to select, record and edit texts for their listening tests, and how to design suitable tasks to assess the construct. Applied linguistic researchers will find scholarly accounts of the construct of listening, that draw on the latest research as well as reflecting the progress made in the field over the past thirty years.

This book follows the tradition established in earlier volumes in the CLAS series, by drawing upon applied linguistic theory and the research literature in order to develop an understanding of the nature of listening. In addition, it calls on research results in the assessment of listening in order to reflect further on the nature of the ability being tested and the most appropriate ways of assessing it. In so doing, this offers suggestions for ways in which language testing research can contribute to a better applied linguistic understanding of the nature of listening, as well as to improved tests. And, as do other volumes in the series, this book presents detailed critical reviews of a number of published listening tests in order to evaluate the extent to which they reflect current theoretical views on listening, as well as the extent to which such tests represent the state of the art in assessing listening. As a result, many practical and constructive suggestions are made for ways in which we can improve the way in which we currently assess listening.

J. Charles Alderson
Lyle F. Bachman

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