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978-0-521-80281-9 - Assessing Grammar  
James E. Purpura  
Frontmatter  
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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa  
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2004  
Reprinted 2005

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*Typeface* 9.5/13pt Utopia *System* QuarkXPress™ [SE]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

ISBN 0 521 80281 4 hardback  
ISBN 0 521 00344 X paperback

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*I dedicate this book to Steve Albanese (M-L)*

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## Series editors' preface to *Assessing Grammar*

Grammar, the structural glue, the “code” of language, is arguably at the heart of language use, whether this involves speaking, listening, reading or writing. Grammar has also been central to language teaching and assessment historically, from the Middle Ages, when “rhetoric” was a key component of a university education, to the “skills-and-components” models of the 1960s that informed both language pedagogy and language testing.

However, although the way grammar is currently viewed, both in theoretical and applied linguistics, and in language learning and language teaching, is vastly different from the perspective that informed grammar tests in the 1960s, very little has changed since then in the way language testers conceive of grammar and in the way it is assessed in practice. Thus, many of the grammar tests that are currently in use, both in large-scale and in classroom assessment, reflect the perspectives of structural linguistics and discrete-point measurement. This book takes a completely new look at the assessment of grammar, placing it in the context of current views of linguistic pragmatics and functional grammar. It thus brings the assessment of grammar into sync with current thinking and practice in applied linguistics and language pedagogy.

The author of this book, Jim Purpura, has extensive experience not only in teaching and assessing grammar, but in training language teachers in grammar and assessment. In this book, he presents a new theoretical approach to defining grammatical ability that provides a basis for designing, developing and using assessments of grammar for a wide range of uses. This approach reflects the belief that grammar cannot be treated as

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an isolated component of knowledge, but must be assessed in the larger context of language in communication.

This book provides a coverage of L2 grammar assessment that is both theoretically grounded and practical, discussing the relevant research and theory, and clearly discussing the practical implications for test development of his approach to defining grammatical ability. The author leads the reader through the process of designing and developing tests to measure L2 grammatical ability. He discusses how L2 grammatical ability can be defined for different types of assessments, and describes the characteristics of assessment tasks that can be used for assessing grammatical ability in a variety of settings, illustrating this with examples of a wide range of grammar assessment tasks. He provides critical reviews of several grammar tests that have been developed professionally, using his framework of L2 grammar ability as a basis for analyzing these.

But this book is not just for language testing professionals. It is also for classroom teachers, as the author devotes an entire chapter to assessments of grammatical ability aimed at supporting learning and instruction. In the closing chapter, the author provides a retrospective overview of how grammar assessment has evolved over the past fifty years. He also discusses some persistent challenges in how we define grammatical ability, how we assess meanings, in the kinds of assessment tasks that are needed to both assess grammatical ability and provide authentic and engaging measures of grammatical performance, and in assessing the development of grammatical ability over time.

In summary, this book is timely, in that it provides a fresh perspective on the assessment of grammar, a perspective that is long overdue, and that brings grammar assessment into line with current theory and practice in language teaching and other areas of applied linguistics. This book provides a principled approach to the design, development and use of grammar assessments, and thus epitomizes what we as series editors hope to achieve in this series: the integration of theory and research in applied linguistics into language assessment in a way that is useful for both the test developer and the classroom teacher.

J. Charles Alderson  
Lyle F. Bachman



## Acknowledgments

In the late 1990s when Lyle Bachman and Charles Alderson invited me to write a book on assessing grammar, the resurging interest in grammar in the field of applied linguistics had already been well underway, and I was delighted. I knew there was no other book on assessing grammatical ability, and I knew this would be a challenge. In the next five years, I worked continuously on this book and am deeply grateful that Lyle, Charles and Mickey Bonin, then of Cambridge University Press, never lost faith that I would finish the manuscript. Having now completed it, I have many people to thank. First, I would like to thank Lyle, Charles and Mickey for their endless patience and steadfast support and enthusiasm for this volume. I would also like to thank them for reading the manuscript carefully and for providing constructive and thought-provoking comments. I would especially like to acknowledge Lyle, who selflessly read and reread each chapter, and then provided detailed comments, feedback and guidance. I just don't know that many people who are willing to engage in a three-year discussion and sometimes impassioned debate on the meaning of 'meaning'. I am sincerely grateful to Lyle for contributing to that discussion and for his ongoing mentorship – and, of course, his good humor.

I would also like to thank Teachers College, Columbia University, for its generous support in many stages of this project. I also wish to thank my colleagues in the TESOL and applied linguistics programs for their continued support and encouragement in writing this book. I am especially grateful to Leslie Beebe for engaging in discussions on pragmatics and to ZhaoHong Han for reading carefully selected chapters and for providing

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valuable comments and feedback. I wish to express my appreciation to Janine Graziano-King from Queens College, CUNY, for her sharp mind and helpful feedback on many aspects of the book. I would like to thank my friends and colleagues at Cambridge ESOL, in particular Nick Saville, Lynda Taylor and Ardeshir Geranpayeh, for reading and commenting on selected chapters.

I wish to thank the many wonderful students who took second language assessment for reading carefully and commenting on the book. I am particularly grateful to those of you who created grammar tests for your final project. I have learned much from you. I would also like to acknowledge the students in my instructed SLA and assessment class for their willingness to debate the issues and for their insightful comments on the multiple drafts. I am particularly grateful to Jaehak Chang, Yunkyong Cho, Kirby Cook Grabowski, Jee Wha Kim, Hae-Jin Kim, Hyunjoo Kim, Nitza Krohn, Alick Liao, Maria McCormack, E. K. Park, Taejoon Park, Michael Perrone, Mary Regan, Yoko Sato, Joowon Suh, Elvis Wagner and Cynthia Wiseman.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues whose ongoing support and belief in me got me through in times when I thought I'd never finish, especially Sara Cushing Weigle, Antony Kunnan, Tim McNamara and Elana Shohamy. I wish to thank my friends, Steve Gudgel, Jimmy Herbolich, Pam Martin, Diane Pinkley, Margie Rosnick and Carmen Velasco for politely letting me blabber on and on about grammar during dinner. Last, but not least, I am deeply grateful to Steve Albanese, who took great care of me during this time, and whose unshakable patience, support and encouragement brought out the best in me. I could never thank you enough.

J.P.