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## Book Review

**Assessing Young Learners of English: Global and Local Perspectives**, Marianne Nikolov (ed.), New York, Springer, 2016, 343 pp., \$139 (US), ISBN 978-3-319-22421-3

This edited volume on assessing Young Learners of English (YLE), defined as children “between the ages of 5 and 12 or so” (p. 19 in the book) who learn English as a language additional to their mother tongue, appeals to me for three reasons: because of my role as a researcher in language assessment, a teacher educator of pre- and in-service English language teachers in an ESL context, and a parent of a six-year-old YLE. In particular, as a researcher with a background in assessing adult English learners, I am interested in knowing what distinguishes the assessment of YLE from that of adults, what is the current state of the art in assessing young learners, and what are the research gaps and future directions.

Chapters 1 and 2 address the above questions and set the context for the following chapters. Specifically, Chap. 1 reviews the issues, trends, challenges and limitations of current research in YLE. Chap. 2 reviews the global enthusiasm for and turbulence surrounding an early-start over the past 30 years (from the 1990s to 2010s) and summarizes major findings from two international surveys of educators regarding the practices of YLE teaching and assessment in over 50 countries and educational contexts.

Chapters 3 and 4 concern setting standards for YLE assessment. The study from Pearson (Chap. 3) approached this by developing a generic inventory of YLE descriptors with the well-known Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as its start point, while the Hungary national project (Chap. 4) followed the CEFR approach to develop localized ‘can-do’ statements for Primary 1-6 students. The Pearson study provides a useful literature review on the differences of YLE from adult learners and the importance of such differences for standard setting. Also useful for assessment researchers are the details reported in this chapter concerning descriptor development and validation. For teachers and teacher educators, Chap. 4 provides useful lists of age-appropriate themes, task and text types for developing classroom-based assessment tasks for YLE.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present three validation studies, two of which concern two international certificate exams of YLE language proficiency, i.e. TOEFL Primary and the computer-based Cambridge Young Learner English test. The study on TOEFL primary involved EFL teachers from 15 countries to judge the relevance and importance of test items in its reading and listening papers. The Cambridge study collected quantitative and qualitative data from young learners, their parents and examiners. The third study is from Poland; it validated a listening and reading test developed for 10-year-old primary students.

Chapters 8 and 9 investigate two local concerns in Germany and China. The German study (Chap. 8) investigated the myth about “the early start”, i.e. does an earlier start make a difference? It compared two cohorts of YLE after 2 and 3.5 years of English instruction and found students starting earlier (at the age of 6) performed better than those that started later (at the age of 8) on receptive skills. The study from China (Chap. 9) analyzed two achievement test papers designed by classroom teachers for parallel courses using two sets of textbooks.

Differences among the two test papers were found to align with the differential emphases of the two textbooks, which had an impact on students' motivation, perceived difficulty of learning and test results.

Chapters 10 and 11 report two longitudinal studies investigating the impact of individual differences (e.g. self-concept, motivation, aptitude) on YLE's development of speaking and listening. The first study tracked the changes of motivation and self-concept; it found self-concept to have higher correlations with oral production than motivation. The second study found aptitude and parents' education, followed by anxiety and beliefs about L2 learning, to be the strongest predictors of listening performance. The findings of the four studies are informative for pre- and in-service teachers, parents, policy makers, and curriculum planners. Teacher educators can use the four studies to introduce content analysis and basic quantitative research methods in YLE research and assessment.

Chapters 12 and 13 focus on self and peer-assessment. Chapter 12 provides a literature review on self-assessment *of* and *for* learning and a classification of existing SA instruments on five dimensions, i.e., domain setting (general or specific), scale setting (the number of levels and the specificity of level descriptors), goal setting (the degree of autonomy and flexibility given to YLE), product or process oriented, and individual independent assessment or assisted. Chapter 13 deals with a classroom-based study in Taiwan investigating peer and self-assessment of oral presentations and their relations with teacher assessment.

Overall, this volume provides readers with an updated 'global and local perspective' on the assessment of YLE as indicated by the book title. It has a collection of studies from diverse contexts: Hungary (Chap. 4 and 11), Poland (Chap. 6), Germany (Chap. 8), China (Chap. 9), Croatia (Chap. 10) and Taiwan (Chap. 13), as well as studies of three international certificate exams of YLE English language proficiency, i.e., Pearson Test of Young Learners, TOEFL Primary and Cambridge YLE test. The chapters cover various issues and stages in assessing YLE from the current state of the art in YLE research and practice (Chap. 1-2), standard setting (Chap. 3-4), test development and validation (Chap. 5-7) in the traditional testing paradigm, to self and peer-assessment and their applications in classrooms (Chap. 12-13). It also includes empirical studies (Chap. 8-11) addressing several important questions concerning YLE education and assessment, such as the effectiveness of an early-start, age-appropriate assessment methods and age-related concerns. As such, this book can be useful introductory material for teacher educators, their student teachers and graduate students interested in YLE education or assessment. Some chapters (3, 4 and 9) can be informative for those interested in constructing age-appropriate YLE assessment. Though the book does not provide exceptionally novel ideas or sophisticated research methods, assessment researchers may find the literature reviews (e.g. Chap. 1-3 on YLE and Chap. 12 on self-assessment), validation designs and data-collection instruments to be informative for their research. One weakness of this collective volume may be the editing and organization. For instance, the chapters could be numbered in the contents table and organized thematically in sections to enable selective reading by readers with different needs and priorities. Some chapters are in need of more careful editing to remove typos, mistakes, and inconsistencies in terminology across chapters (for instance, the age range of YLE is defined as 'from 6 to 12 or so' on page 2, but '5 to 12' on page 19). Relating to this, the numbering of chapters in this book review is in strict accordance with the sequence of their appearance in the book.

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