

Social Justice Forum, Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> of April, 14:30 – 17:30

[ALTEs 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference, Madrid, 26-28 April 2023](#)

Language tests are often portrayed as instruments that open doors to professional and educational opportunities, thereby fostering integration and democratic participation. While it is clearly the case that passing a language test may grant access to education, jobs, and citizenship, it is equally true that not passing such tests denies other candidates these same opportunities. Language tests are tools of selection that function as both door-openers and gatekeepers within a larger societal system. Language tests are never value neutral but represent and reproduce certain ideas of what counts as acceptable and appropriate language forms and language use. **In this forum we wish to examine the values underlying language tests as well as the different roles that language tests play in the societal system and discuss whether and how high-stakes language tests can be a force for the good.**

To that end, this forum provides a venue for scholars from different disciplines to reflect on the use of high-stakes language tests in society. The presentations will be followed by a discussant tying the topics raised together.

Welcome & introduction: Social justice – barriers and opportunities	<a href="#">Cecilie Hamnes Carlsen</a>	20
Mandatory integration requirements for foreigners in the EU: what role for human rights?	<a href="#">Zvezda Vankova</a>	20
Dialogue and engagement between policymakers and language test developers	<a href="#">Laura Schildt</a>	20
Citizenship test exemptions around Spanish and Catalan	<a href="#">Kamran Khan</a>	20
BREAK (16:00-16:30)		30
Language testing and language rights	<a href="#">Dina Vilcu</a>	20
Plurilingual profiles and multilingual needs of adult refugees and migrants in Greece and Italy	<a href="#">Anna Mouti</a>	20
Discussant	<a href="#">Nick Saville</a>	10

## **Abstracts**

### **Welcome & introduction: Social justice – barriers and opportunities.**

*Cecilie Hammes Carlsen*

What is social justice, which role does language and language tests play in relation to social justice, and what professional responsibility and concrete possibilities do language testers have to prevent their tests from being used in ways that contribute to discrimination, racialization and exclusion? These important questions are central to the social justice forum and will be briefly discussed as an introduction to the forum, serving as a background for the following invited presentations.

### **Mandatory integration requirements for foreigners in the EU: what role for human rights?**

*Zvezda Vankova*

This lecture aims to present the human rights standards of the Council of Europe developed through the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and the European Social Charter, and the legal standards of the European Union in the field of integration of immigrants and refugees. A special focus is placed on civic integration and language requirements, which can affect the enjoyment of family life and long-term residence by migrants and refugees. The lecture concludes with a discussion on the practical challenges when implementing such integration requirements and their consequences in light of the existing human rights standards.

### **Dialogue and engagement between policymakers and language test developers**

*Laura Schildt*

This talk will explore how language test developers intervene in the policy-making process. Few studies have examined how language test developers and policymakers interact and language testing literature may even cast language test developers as bystanders whose instruments are misused for construct-irrelevant purposes. In discussing how high-stakes language tests can be a force for good it is necessary to ask to what extent test developers can and do impact high-stakes language testing policies in Europe and how they view the use of tests in this context. The current talk will present results from a comparative study which used an exploratory design and semi-structured interviews with 28 test executives representing 25 exam boards in 20 European countries. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed in NVivo using double coding (Weighted Kappa = .83) with a priori and inductive codes. A simplified horizontal analysis was run to evaluate responses to the research questions by participant and then a detailed vertical, between-case analysis of the data to look for common themes between respondents by research question. Findings indicate that respondents are regularly in contact with policymakers and provide research-based evidence to policymakers which can help improve the validity, reliability, and fairness of language tests. However, the roles that language testers play in the policymaking process vary greatly from unsolicited critique in countries with

less participatory democratic structures to participatory decision-making in countries with more open democratic structures.

### **Citizenship test exemptions around Spanish and Catalan**

*Kamran Khan*

The Spanish language and civic knowledge citizenship has been in place for a relatively short period of time. This talk will examine preliminary findings from the IMPECT which explores the issue of exemptions from such language testing. The data is generated from responses to a questionnaire on language teacher attitudes to citizenship language testing in various countries. The focus of this talk will be in Spain in relation to not only Spanish but other co-official languages. The talk will be of interest to locally based academics, practitioners and teachers.

### **Language testing and language rights**

*Dina Vilcu*

Language tests can be seen as instruments often used by (political) decision makers to regulate individuals' access to education, work and public services. People who need to prove their linguistic proficiency might come from within the state borders (e.g., from minority communities) or from outside the country. The purpose of "gate keeping" easily comes to mind in relation to language testing for official purposes. This industry roots and grows most intensively and extensively in affluent countries, which support democracy and non-discrimination, including on language grounds. Are language rights, along with the other human rights, really protected in this context? Decision makers can be helped in assessing their part in this by researchers in the field of languages and by test developers, who often reflect on the social dimension of language testing. This presentation advocates for a change of perspective on language testing, which needs to become a gate opener towards languages which are much less tested in present. If language testing is an instrument, then it needs to become an instrument for learning about different cultures, for preserving language diversity and ultimately for contributing to the preservation and promotion of language human rights. This can be done by encouraging the creation and promotion of tests for smaller languages, which will lead to growing motivation for learning new languages, to creation of resources and to a larger use of the languages.

### **Plurilingual profiles and multilingual needs of adult refugees and migrants in Greece and Italy**

*Anna Mouti*

The issue of language education of adult refugees plays a very important role in the integration of refugee and migrant populations and the recognition of linguistic repertoires and multilingual needs may form the planning dynamics of relevant programs and tailor-made courses. Greece and Italy share a double role both as host and transition countries, as two of the main EU entry points for refugees and migrants since the 2015 refugee crisis. In this study individual

differences related to language will be examined in Greece and Italy and plurilingual profiles, linguistic repertoires and multilingual needs of adult refugees and migrants will be assessed and identified, with a particular focus on L2 Greek and L2 Italian. We will examine ways that social justice links to language needs analysis, multilingual assessment, and language education opportunities-barriers for refugees and migrants.

## Presenters' bio

**Cecilie Hammes Carlsen** is professor in second language acquisition at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences. She holds a PhD in language assessment and has worked for 20 years with the development and validation of language tests for adult migrants in Norway. Her research interests are primarily related to the use and misuse of language tests and the consequences of language tests on test takers and society, in the labour market, in higher education and related to residence and citizenship. She is currently involved in the IMPECT project focusing on the consequences of language requirements for residence and citizenship on low-literate adult migrants.

**Zvezda Vankova** is researcher at the Law Faculty of Lund University and the principal investigator of the project 'Refugee protection or cherry picking? Assessing new admission policies for refugees in Europe' (2023-2026) funded by the Swedish Research Council. She holds a PhD in Law from Maastricht University. Before joining academia, Dr Vankova worked at the Migration Policy Group in Brussels and Open Society Institute in Sofia. The overall focus of her research aims to examine the interface of legal infrastructures pertaining to human mobility and how their enforcement influences the rights and trajectories of people on the move. More specifically, her research interests lie at the intersection of EU law, Public International Law and empirical legal studies with a focus on human rights, migration, integration and complementary pathways for refugees. She has acted as a consultant on migrant and refugee rights matters to the European Parliament, the Council of Europe's Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, and the UNHCR.

**Laura Anne Schildt** is a PhD researcher at Ghent University, Belgium working on a project entitled, 'High-stakes Language Tests, Migration Policy, and Ethical Codes'. Her primary research interests focus on public policy and validation in language testing. Before coming to Belgium, she worked in the area of language teaching and language assessment in Spain.

**Kamran Khan** is an associate professor and the director of the MOSAIC research group on multilingualism at the University of Birmingham. He has specialised in citizenship language testing for over 10 years and has worked in the UK, Spain and Denmark. He was a Marie Curie Fellow and has previously worked on a variety of projects related to issues around citizenship, race and security. He is the author of 'Becoming British: Linguistic Trials and Negotiations' (Bloomsbury, 2019).

**Dina Vilcu** teaches and assesses Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca. She teaches general language and LSAP courses (for social and humanistic sciences and arts), as well as tailor made courses for interpreters and translators. She also teaches courses on LSP and language assessment at MA level. She is interested in the challenges involved in language assessment for less widely tested languages (LWTL), currently chairing ALTE's LWTL SIG. She also writes about the use of language in critical historic moments (like the Revolution in 1989 in Romania) and in movements of protest (like the ones against the alteration of the justice laws in Romania in 2016-2017).

**Anna Mouti** is an Assistant Professor of Second Language Acquisition and Applied Linguistics, at the School of Italian Language and Literature at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece. She also cooperates with the MA Programme "Language education for

refugees and migrants” of the Hellenic Open University. It was her involvement in the language education of adult refugees and migrants in Greece that led her to the ALTE -LAMI Special Interest Group and she is mainly involved in the LASLLIAM-LAMI research goals. She is an ALTE Individual Expert Member.