AI and Language Assessment: Challenges and Potential

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ABSTRACT

Language testing is an inseparable part of learning and teaching. Rapid improvements in technology promise to make language assessment more accessible, efficient, economical and reliable. This potential is of huge interest to test developers, educational institutions and governments. In the age of a global pandemic, the possibility of remote testing that computers present is particularly alluring and has leant impetus to the adoption and acceptance of new ways of testing. Yet the prospect of leveraging technology-enabled assessment – and Artificial Intelligence in particular – raises questions around what is possible, what is feasible, and what is desirable in order to provide fair and valid tests that result in positive consequences for all stakeholders.

This presentation begins by exploring the current capabilities and future directions of technology-enabled testing, providing examples from British Council projects and global initiatives. While technology is a potential enabler of large-scale, rapid-results assessment of language ability, there are threats associated with it and the webinar seeks to address the alarm raised by McNamara that communicative language assessment is "at a moment of crisis" (2014, p.227) as technological and sociolinguistic factors converge.

We highlight the challenges and risks and explore possible actions the language assessment and wider educational communities can take to mitigate these while realising the benefits of new technology. The presentation will be of interest to language testing professionals, educators and policy makers.