Approaches to language testing have traditionally tended to follow theories in second-language acquisition and subsequent trends in language teaching. Current approaches reflect this same tendency with language testers recognizing more and more the need to tap the communicative abilities of the learner in specific contexts. The title of this volume, *Testing Communicative Performance*, suggests that the author will tell us how to tap those communicative abilities. However, the subtitle, *An Interim Study*, subtly indicates that we will not find complete guidelines for doing so here. What is provided is a direction for test development which reflects Munby's (1978) functional approach to language teaching.

Carroll offers specific steps for utilizing Munby's needs analysis procedure as the basis for test content specification. In order to follow Carroll's guidelines, one must embrace Munby's functional approach to needs analyses. The problem with doing so is that the approach seems far too cumbersome to be practical for most test development projects. The taxonomy of language skills, for example, with 260 micro-skills in 54 skill categories is overwhelming. Carroll shows in Appendix A how only certain relevant skills are selected for inclusion in a communicative needs profile, but the process remains tedious. Needs analyses that feed directly into item specifications for language tests must be manageable in scope.

Nevertheless, Carroll's application of Munby's approach offers direction as Carroll stresses the interactive nature of language and demonstrates how the work he and his colleagues have been doing in language testing has been influenced by the important pedagogical focus on language as communication in specific contexts. Two extended examples are used to take the reader through the test development procedure beginning with communicative needs profiles. The examples are of two foreign visitors to Britain who both must be able to function in English for different reasons. The first wishes to take a business studies course and needs English for academic purposes; the second wishes to meet the daily demands of living in Britain for a short time and needs English for social survival.

In discussions throughout the book, the focus is on *use* as opposed to *usage* as the ultimate criterion in language testing. *Use* refers to the implementation of language for communicative purpose. *Usage* refers to the formal patterns (structural, lexical, phonological, etc.) of language. (See Widdowson, 1978, for a complete discussion of the distinction between the two.) While stressing the importance of emphasizing *use* in assessment procedures, Carroll does not ignore the important relationship between *use* and *usage*. To consider one without the other would be pointless. As a means of handling the interrelationship of the two, Carroll suggests a two-tier approach to language testing in which the first-tier phase is concerned with *usage* and the second-tier phase deals with assessing mastery of *use*. If a person being tested does not demonstrate sufficient control over the basic language patterns of the first-tier test(s), then the administration of additional function-specific tests would be delayed. This is a practical way of approaching certain kinds of language testing situations because it allows for a general common evaluation of all testees in a given setting followed by more specific task-oriented evaluations as needed. Indeed, Farhady (1980) suggests a similar two-phase approach for university placement testing.

In the chapter on the development of communicative tests, Carroll discusses the drawbacks
of traditional item-analysis procedures and offers as an alternative a criterion-referenced item analysis procedure which is based on a nine-point language band system. The band system, which is in effect a rating scale, is an integral part of the testing operations being reported on and is still being refined. The item analysis procedure discussed by Carroll seems promising, but as he points out, ‘. . . the trial of test materials, the handling of testeees and the analysis of items is a recursive process requiring several phases before acceptable precision is likely to be achieved’ (66).

Perhaps the most valuable feature of this volume, and one that makes it a good candidate as a textbook in a language-testing course, is the way the author succeeds in raising a number of issues, directly and indirectly, about language testing at the same time as he explains his communicative test development approach. Issues such as the effectiveness of traditional language testing formats, the need for authenticity of context and norm-referenced vs criterion-referenced tests are by no means new, but Carroll raises them all and shows how consideration of each one must play a part in any attempt to develop language tests.

The chapter entitled “Communicative Testing Literature”, also in the issue-raising vein, provides (1) a series of quotations which ‘summarize current thinking on communicative language study and the implications for testing’ (90), (2) a report on some experimental data ‘to show that extended measurement and elaborate data handling may prove curiously unrewarding’ (96) and (3) a discussion of norm-referenced and criterion-referenced approaches to measurement. In some ways the chapter seems an afterthought because while each section has merit, the three do not really “hang together” as a unit. Still, each section offers important points for consideration. For example, the quotations make clear the need for exploratory work in communicative test development and the experimental data, like other similar data in the field, cause us to question again what variously labeled tests really measure.

I for one am pleased with this book not because it offers any striking new ideas or provides any definitive answers, but because while providing a quite detailed report on one kind of test development in progress, it also provides a current perspective on language testing and suggests some critical areas for further exploration. Regardless of one’s reaction to Carroll’s test system, all involved in language testing must deal with the issues he raises. This volume nicely complements and supplements other textbooks on language testing — Heaton (1975), Oller (1979) Cohen (1980) — and adds to what I hope is a growing momentum in test development.

Frances B. Hinofotis

University of California, Los Angeles
Department of English
Los Angeles, CA 90024
USA

NOTES

1Cf. H.-E. Piepho’s review of this book in System (1980), 8: 166—169. (Editor’s note.)
2Cf. also N. F. Davies’ review of this book in System (1979), 7: 228—230.
REFERENCES


In a number of respects this is a very difficult book to react to. It is nothing like as coherent as Stevick’s Memory, Meaning and Method (1979), being partly a developing argument, partly papers given at various times to various audiences, and partly accounts of teaching processes written by others. It develops the interest shown in the earlier book towards ‘The Silent Way’, ‘Counseling-Learning’ and ‘Suggestopaedia’, but by looking at them more carefully it analyses and exposes the differences between the three approaches much more clearly than in the earlier book. At the same time, it is clearly, and avowedly a ‘humanistic’ text, both through the stance and conviction of the author, and through the devices used in the text. To take a few widely different examples, personal poems appear regularly and a preference is generally shown for the pronoun ‘she’ in talking about teachers (a device which some British female teachers find patronising). Also, a certain inconsistency of tone is deliberately cultivated by the author: one minute the discussion is essentially philosophical and logical, the next an amusing anecdote (usually of striking aptness) is being quoted, and then a moral, even mystical exhortation leads us into the realms of personal commitment in which language teaching is related to our deepest impulses.

A Way and Ways is therefore both an exciting and exasperating book to read. It is exciting because it challenges us, because it charts the progress of a sensitive and erudite teacher in an uncompromising effort to grapple with the weaknesses inherent in an extraordinarily successful career of language teaching. It is exasperating because it appears to be willing, even determined, to be sensitive, whilst being deliberately apologetic about its own erudition, as if thinking is something to be ashamed of. Paradoxically, the combination of coherent argument with what might be called mysticism does in some ways make it more difficult to see Stevick as a ‘whole person’ himself. A coherent discussion of mysticism may not really communicate this, but it does enable us to see its connection with intellectual development, rather than as something in opposition to it. However, by and large, this