

**Japan Language Testing Association
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Invited Plenary Speaker**

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Title of the plenary address

Task-based language assessment: Aligning designs with intended uses and consequences

Abstract

Tasks have captured the attention of testers and educators for some time (e.g., Cureton, 1951), because they present goal-oriented, contextualized challenges that prompt examinees to deploy cognitive skills and domain-related knowledge in authentic performances. Such performances present a distinct advantage when teaching, learning, and assessment focus on what learners *can do* rather than merely emphasizing what they *know* (Kane, 2001; Wiggins, 1998). Over the past several decades, tasks have come to play a crucial role in language assessments on a variety of levels, from classroom-based tests, to professional certifications, to large-scale language proficiency exams (Norris, 2016). However, not all task-based assessments are alike. Indeed, the types of tasks in focus, the nature of performances elicited, and the criteria used for scoring responses all depend on the ways in which assessments are being used and the consequences that are intended. In this talk, I will provide numerous examples of the incorporation of tasks into language assessment practice across diverse settings and for distinct purposes. In doing so, I would like to challenge the common misinterpretation that language tests are either task-based or not. Instead, I will demonstrate how communicative language tasks serve as a core construct underlying many language assessments, while features of their design vary in specific ways based on how they are being interpreted and what decisions or actions ensue. In particular, I will highlight design differences between classroom-based, learning-oriented assessments and standardized language proficiency assessments, both of which can benefit from adopting a task-based approach. I will also suggest some of the positive consequences of task-based assessment for language learners, teachers, and programs, and I will point to the dangers of using certain assessments that do not incorporate communicative tasks in their designs. Finally, I will discuss some of the validity challenges for task-based language assessment, and I will recommend a variety of solutions.

Biographical information

John Norris is Principal Research Scientist and Senior Research Director in the Center for English Language Learning and Assessment at Educational Testing Service, where he manages research on English language teaching, learning, and assessment. Prior to joining ETS, he was associate professor at Georgetown University, where he was founding director of the Assessment and Evaluation Language Resource Center. He also worked as associate professor at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and as assessment specialist at Northern Arizona University. John's teaching and research focus on language education (task-based language teaching, in particular), assessment, program evaluation, and research methods. He has published widely on language education and assessment, including recent books on "Second language educational experiences for adult learners", "Improving and extending quantitative reasoning in second language research", "Innovation and accountability in foreign language program evaluation", and "Student learning outcomes assessment in college foreign language programs". John speaks and conducts research on German, Portuguese, and Spanish, and he is currently working on acquiring Japanese.