

# Language Assessment Literacy 2.0: Challenges and opportunities

Benjamin Kremmel

BAAL TEASIG 2020



[@benjaminkremmel](https://twitter.com/benjaminkremmel)

# Overview

- Language Assessment Literacy: beta – 1.0 – 2.0?
- Technology in high-stakes vs. low-stakes assessment
- Exemplary issues and challenges
- Ways forward?

# Defining (language) assessment literacy (beta)

- “the knowledge assessors need to possess”

(Stiggins, 1991)

- “although there has been a considerable amount of research in general education into teachers’ assessment practices, levels and training and professional development needs [...], there have been relatively few investigations of these questions in the context of language teaching programmes”

(Brindley, 2001)

# Defining language assessment literacy (LAL 1.0)

- “a repertoire of competences that enable an individual to understand, evaluate and, in some cases, create **language** assessments and analyse assessment data.”

(Pill & Harding, 2013 – adapted and emphasis added)

- “...a range of skills related to test production, test score interpretation and use, and test evaluation in conjunction with the development of a **critical understanding about the roles and functions of assessment within society**”.

(O’Loughlin, 2013, emphasis added)

- “the ability to design, develop and **critically evaluate tests and other assessment procedures**, as well as the ability to monitor, evaluate, grade and score assessments on the basis of theoretical knowledge”

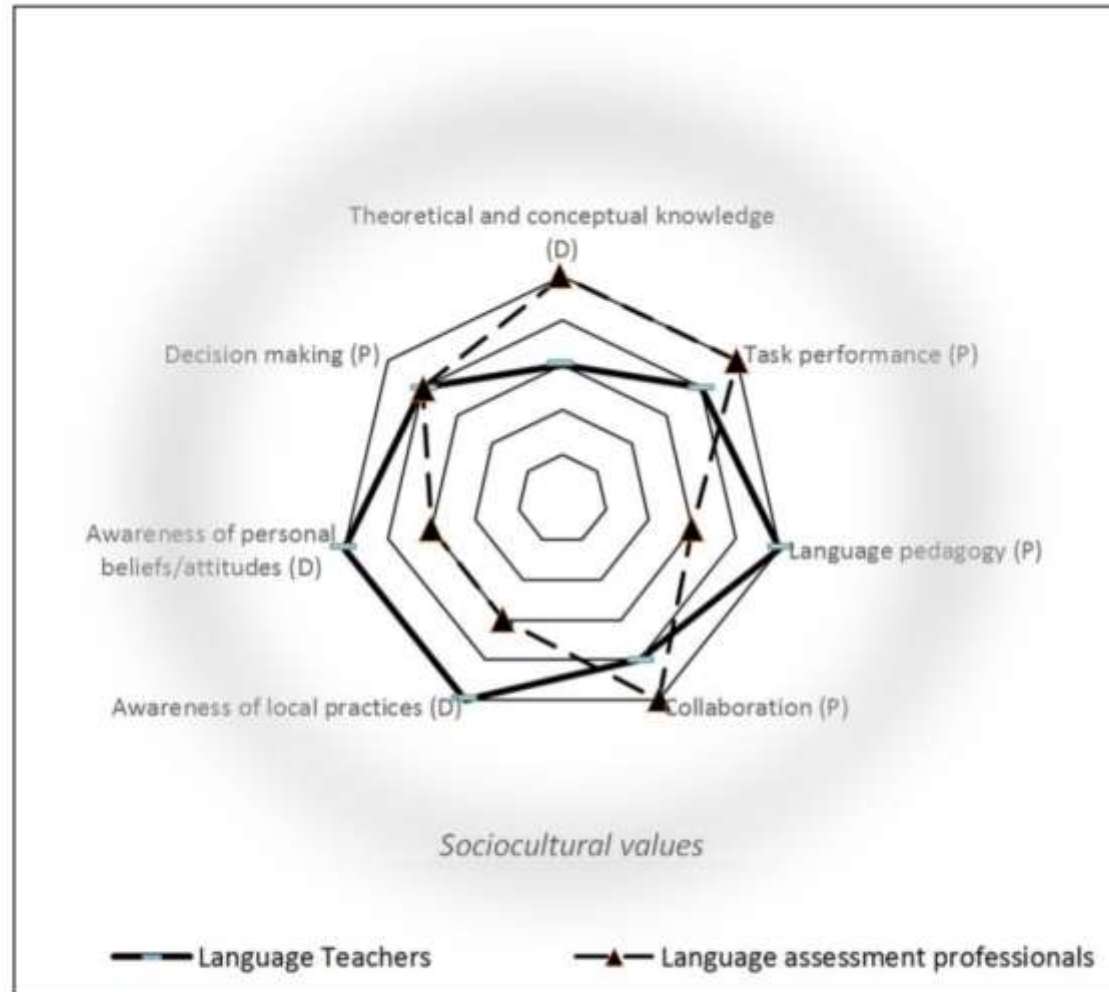
(Vogt & Tsagari, 2014, emphasis added)

# Defining language assessment literacy (LAL 2.0 ?)

Given the digital age – do our conceptualisations of LAL sufficiently reflect technology-awareness?

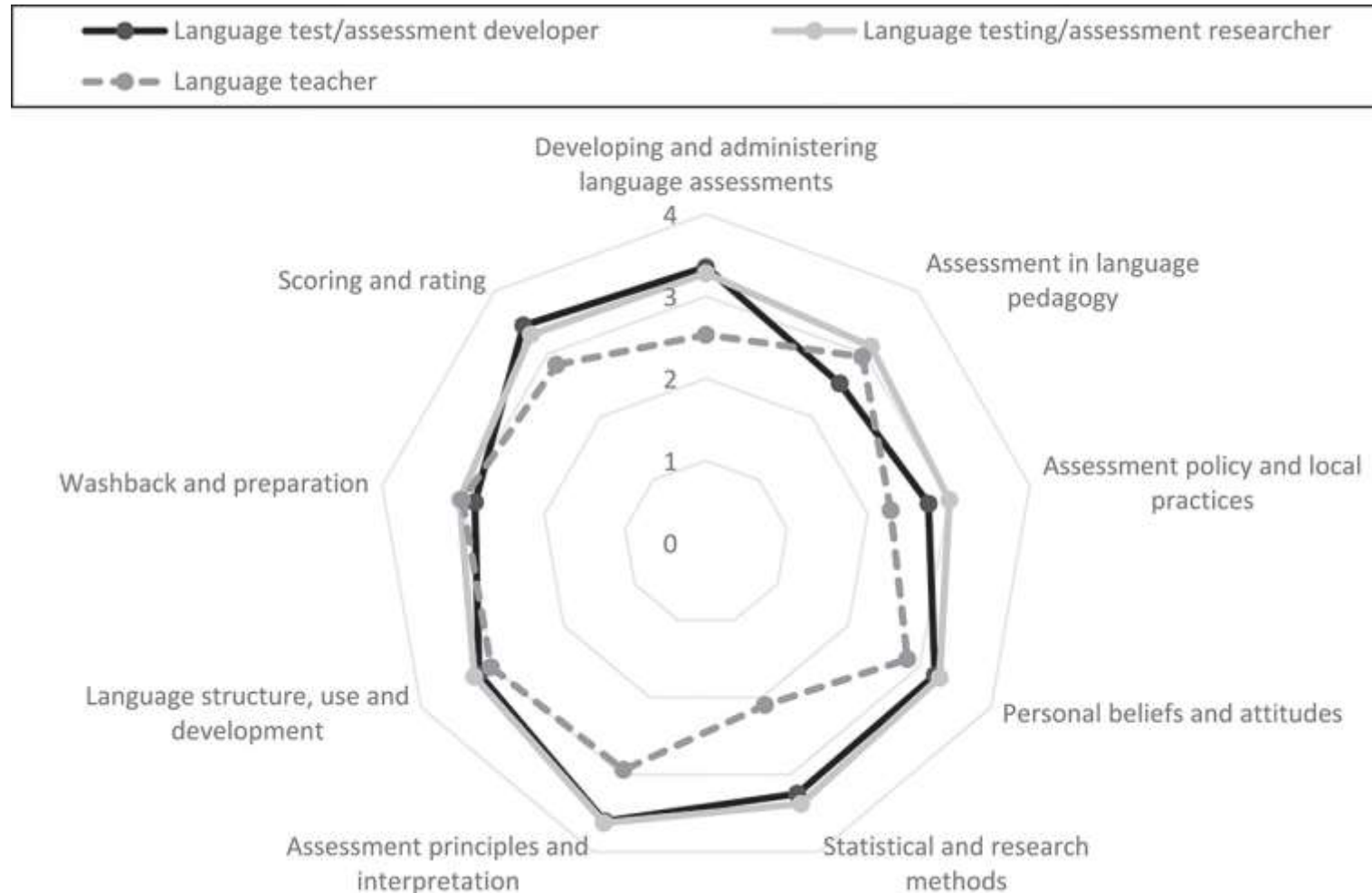
- Particularly in relation to the ability to critically evaluate aspects of language assessment?

# Current conceptualisations: Baker & Riches (2018)



**Figure 2.** An alternate characterization of the LAL required for language teachers and language assessment professionals.

# Current conceptualisations: Kremmel & Harding (2020)



# So...

- Only implicit technology awareness in our conceptualisations of LAL
- Only limited reference to technological advances in our organisations' guidelines
  - e.g. ILTA Guidelines for Practice revised only now



# Why might that be an issue?

Schmidgall and Powers (2017) note that technology has been having a huge impact on how tests are

- developed
- administered
- scored
- monitored
- validated (Harding, 2018)

# Why might that be an issue?

Table 21.1 Opportunities and challenges presented by technology for stages of high-stakes testing.

	<i>Test development and administration</i>	<i>Scoring</i>	<i>Security</i>
Opportunities	Increased efficiency, flexibility, and standardization	Automated systems providing cheaper, faster, more reliable scoring (at scale)	Monitoring equipment, biometric identification
Challenges	Need for more items, test forms	Narrowing construct of measurement	Use of devices that facilitate cheating, infiltration of digital systems

(Schmidgall & Powers, 2017)

# However...

Schmidgall and Powers (2017) also note:

“Technology is used in both high- and low-stakes testing, but may be particularly beneficial for high-stakes tests that need to accommodate large test-taker populations with standardized administrations.” (p. 317)

- So what does this mean for low(er)-stakes assessment?
  - No/less technology in assessment used/needed?
  - No/less serious challenges?
  - No/less language assessment literacy needed?
  - No/less technological awareness in language assessment literacy needed?

# Technology in low-stakes assessment

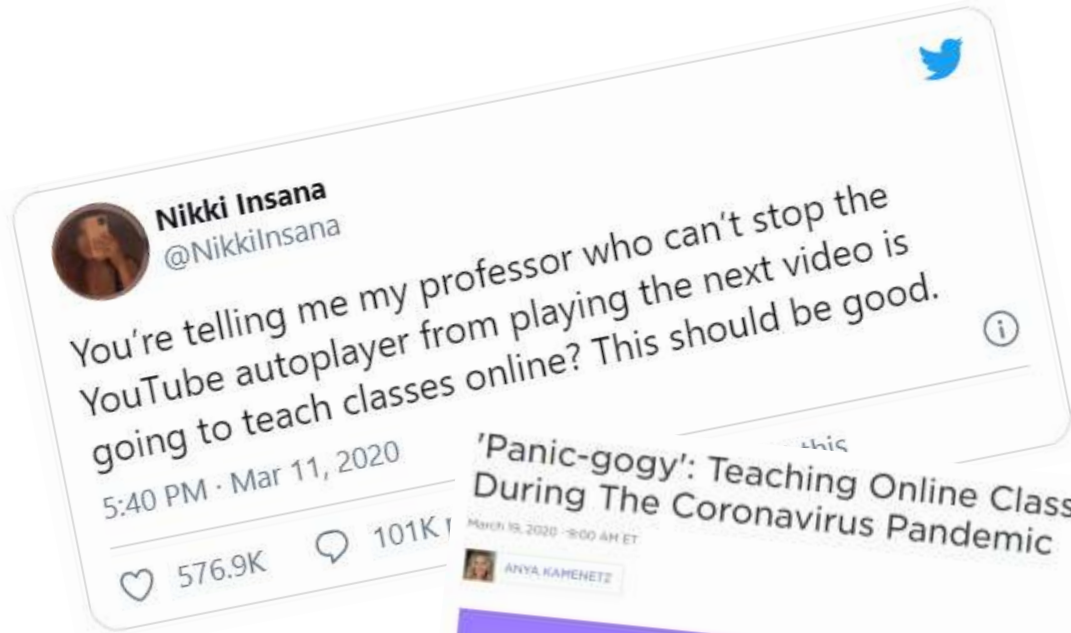
- “not a simple dichotomy“ (Tannenbaum & Kane, 2019)

But:

- Probably fair to say that technology has not quite trickled down into low-stakes assessment the way it has been pursued in high-stakes testing (resources, etc.)

***Ironically, the reason why I am speaking to you *only virtually*, and *only now* has provided even more evidence to support this argument***

# COVID-19



**Nikki Insana**  
@NikkiInsana

You're telling me my professor who can't stop the YouTube autoplayer from playing the next video is going to teach classes online? This should be good.

5:40 PM · Mar 11, 2020

576.9K likes 101K replies



As colleges across the country pivot online on very short notice, there are a host of complications — from laptops and Internet access to mental health and financial needs.

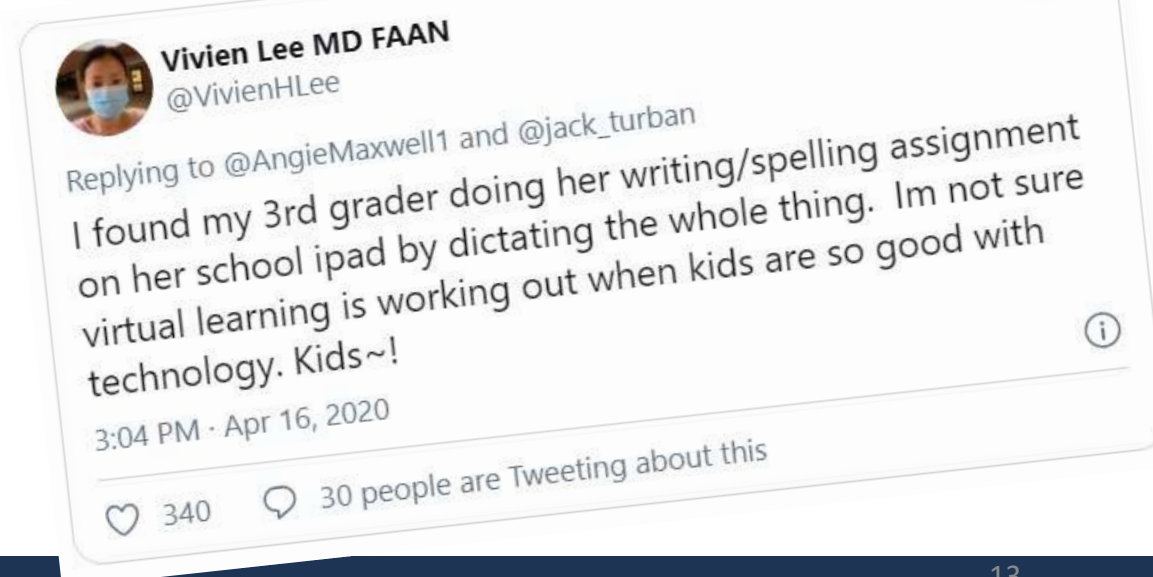


**Angie Maxwell**  
@AngieMaxwell1

Found the kid playing with her dog instead of Zooming with her teacher. She told me not to worry. She took a screenshot of herself "paying attention," then cut her video & replaced it with the picture. "It's a gallery view of 20 kids, mom. They can't tell." She is 10. #COVID19

7:47 AM · Apr 15, 2020

259.2K likes



**Vivien Lee MD FAAN**  
@VivienHLee

Replying to @AngieMaxwell1 and @jack\_turban

I found my 3rd grader doing her writing/spelling assignment on her school ipad by dictating the whole thing. Im not sure virtual learning is working out when kids are so good with technology. Kids~!

3:04 PM · Apr 16, 2020

340 likes 30 people are Tweeting about this

<https://www.npr.org/2020/03/19/817885991/panic-gogy-teaching-online-classes-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

# COVID-19

highlighted...

- a lack of digital literacy (let alone digital language assessment literacy)
  - in low-stakes scenarios we're probably just as worried about digital literacy of teachers/administrators
- a lack of resources for digital/online assessment
  - Even high-stakes testing organisations partly struggled to pivot to online testing  
(Isbell & Kremmel, 2020)
- that nevertheless technology in assessment may be here to stay

# Consequences

- We need to combine LAL with a technology awareness

(Harding, 2018)

- For both high-stakes and low-stakes assessment scenarios and stakeholders, as also highlighted by this very conference's theme

# Some examples

Chapelle and Douglas already argued in 2006 that language ability itself may need to be defined in terms of an interaction between language and technology

- So what is “authentic language assessment” today/in the future?

(Spöttl, Konrad, Schwarz, Guggenbichler & Kremmel, forthc.)

- Is there a danger of narrowing constructs because of technology in assessment?
  - Automated scoring?
  - Automated pronunciation assessment (Harding, 2018)?
  - Criticisms of Duolingo or Versant tests (e.g. Wagner & Kunnan, 2015)?



# In general

“[As] the technology-related issues of language assessment will continue to increase in their detail and complexity, and the need will continue to grow for professionals capable of negotiating the many considerations that come into play in the design of computer-assisted language tests.”

(Chapelle & Voss, 2016)

“Technology reemphasises the need for researchers to investigate the consequences of testing”

(Chapelle & Voss, 2017)

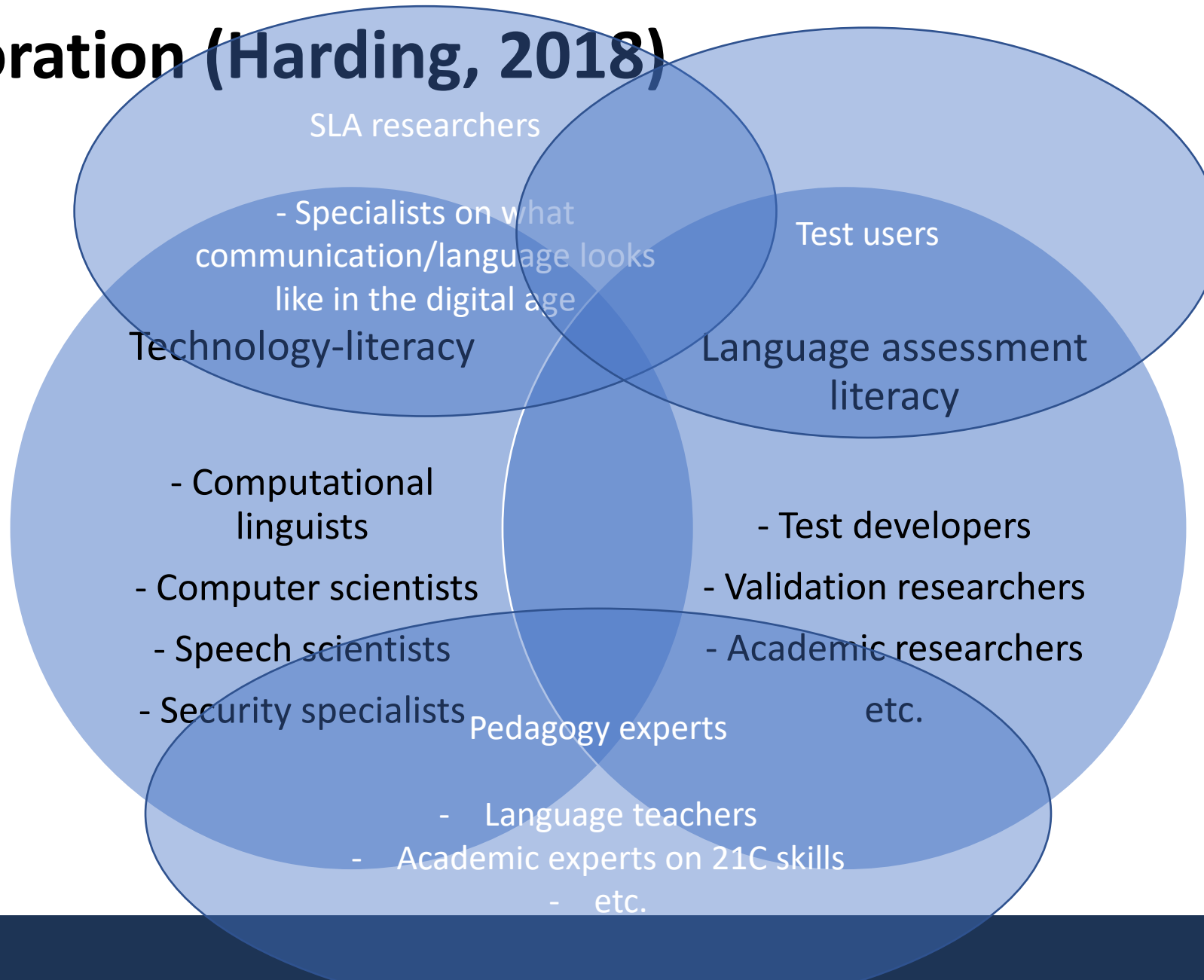
# So how do we get there?

I don't know

But I do see at least two opportunities for ways forward:

- Transparency
- Collaboration

# Collaboration (Harding, 2018)



# Outlook

Do we need a new definition of LAL 2.0?

- I don't think so, but we need to move into that “shared space”
- not just with tech experts, but also with experts on e.g. how tech has changed communication, language and constructs in general,...
- And particularly the more language assessment literate community of assessment experts needs to support and engage with those involved in low-stakes assessment contexts in “future-proofing” assessments

# LAL collaborator



Luke Harding  
(Lancaster University)

**Thank you for your attention!**

Questions?  
Comments?

[benjamin.kremmel@uibk.ac.at](mailto:benjamin.kremmel@uibk.ac.at)

 [@benjaminkremmel](https://twitter.com/benjaminkremmel)