

Reflections on Carol A. Chapelle's Contributions to Applied Linguistics: Perspectives from her Students

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Abstract

This paper reflects on Dr Carol Ann Chapelle's contributions to applied linguistics from the perspectives of some of her former students. As alumni of the Applied Linguistics and Technology (ALT) doctoral program at Iowa State University, we had the privilege of spending a significant amount of time with her, thus being able to closely observe her approach to research and teaching, her evolving research interests, and the increasing impact of her work in the field of applied linguistics. Our reflections on her accomplishments and contributions are centred around her academic achievements in areas such as computer-assisted language learning (CALL), computer-assisted language testing (CALT) and validity theory and validation practices; the qualities and traits that she exhibits which we believe enabled her to succeed; and her dedication to teaching, mentoring, and training of the next generation of applied linguists. Each author provided their reflections independently, based on their personal experiences of studying and collaborating with her. Dr Chapelle is a distinguished but low-key scholar. We intend to reveal the extensive efforts she has made behind the scenes to advance the knowledge and practice of language learning, teaching and assessment.

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¹Introduction

We feel deeply honoured to be invited by Dr Hassan Mohebbi to write a personal reflection paper regarding Dr Carol Ann Chapelle's contributions to applied linguistics. Carol is a widely esteemed scholar. She is Distinguished Professor and Dean's Professor in Liberal Arts and Sciences at Iowa State University (ISU). She is a recipient of multiple prestigious awards such as the Distinguished Achievement Award in Language Testing given by Cambridge University Press & Assessment and the International Language Testing Association (ILTA), the Test Validity Research and Evaluation Award for a Senior Scholar given by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), and the Distinguished Service and Scholarship Award given by the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL).

The authors of this paper are four alumni of the Applied Linguistics and Technology (ALT) doctoral program at ISU (albeit from different cohorts). As Carol's former students, advisees and research collaborators, we were able to closely observe her ways of working, including conducting research and teaching students. Carol had a profound influence on our research careers and philosophy. In the remainder of this paper, we will reflect on our individual experiences of studying and working with her and piece together our perceptions of her academic contributions to the field of applied linguistics.

Reflections from Jing Xu

I have known Carol since I started my doctoral studies in 2006. She was then the President of AAAL and had just stepped down from her role as *TESOL Quarterly* editor. I was a member in the second cohort of the ALT doctoral program that Carol co-founded together with Dr Dan Douglas, Dr Volker Hegelheimer, Dr John Levis and Dr Viviana Cortes in May 2005. My fellow classmates in the cohort included Dr Jim Ranalli, Dr Erik Voss, Dr Yoo-Ree Chung, and Dr Adolfo Carrillo Cabello. All of them are now successful applied linguists specializing in either computer-assisted language learning (CALL) or language assessment. I had the privilege of taking several of Carol's postgraduate courses, being her research assistant, and having her as my dissertation supervisor.

Carol is known for her endeavours to pursue innovations in language learning, teaching and assessment by taking advantage of technology. The two problems she is keen to solve are "how to use computer technologies to innovate and improve language teaching and learning" and "how to create the best language tests" (Chapelle, 2016, p. 275). Driven by these research interests, she has published a large volume of academic works (e.g. Chapelle, 2001, 2003; Chapelle & Douglas, 2006) and practitioner-oriented handbooks (e.g. Chapelle & Jamieson, 2008; Chapelle & Sauro, 2017; Stoyhoff & Chapelle, 2005) to guide and inspire the research and practice concerning CALL and computer-assisted language testing (CALT). Her passion in investigating the promise of cutting-edge

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technologies for applied linguistics can be seen in the expansion of her research interests, from CALL and CALT to natural language processing (Chapelle & Chung, 2010; Chapelle, Chung, et al., 2008) and generative AI (Chapelle, 2024, 2025; Chapelle et al., 2024). The high impact of her research is manifested by the large number of citations her publications have received and the numerous invited talks she has given.

In addition to her expertise in technology, Carol is widely recognized as a leading validity theorist. She is a strong advocate for the interactionist perspective of construct definition for language assessment and second language acquisition (Chapelle, 1998), which provides a sound theoretical basis for teaching and assessing language for specific purposes. Carol is also one of the pioneers, alongside Bachman and Palmer (2010), in applying Kane's (2006) argument-based approach to validation to language assessment. Her work on building a validity argument for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (Chapelle, Enright, et al., 2008) set an example of using the argument-based framework for the language assessment community. She has been a leading proponent for argument-based validity (Chapelle, 2021; Chapelle, Enright, et al., 2010; Chapelle & Voss, 2021) and unquestionably deserves the credit for making it rise to prominence in language assessment over the past 15 years. The aforementioned two awards that she received from ILTA and AERA recognized her seminal contributions to validity theory and validation practices in language assessment.

Carol's seminal work also includes editing *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, which resulted in 1,100 entries covering diverse topics in applied linguistics (Chapelle, 2013). That was an ambitious and labour-intensive project that requires a wide breadth of knowledge, outstanding leadership and strong commitment. Although Carol admitted in an informal interview with ALT students that she tried to do things within her defined scope of interest, she obviously stepped out of her scope to lead on this comprehensive reference work that could benefit the entire applied linguistics community. She is so keen to capture contemporary thinking in the field that she is currently working on the second edition of the encyclopedia, which will be published in 2026.

Besides Carol's stellar academic achievements, a major contribution of hers (as well as Dan's), in my opinion, is the establishment of the ALT doctoral program, the first of its kind to provide students with formal training in both applied linguistics and technology. Carol had a clear and unswerving vision on the growing intersection between the two disciplines. However, recognizing the large size and complexity of the two problems she tackles, her strategy was to duplicate herself or create a group of next-generation researchers (Chapelle, 2016, p. 276). The ALT doctoral program has been highly successful. It has produced a large number of applied linguists with a broad range of expertise for both academia and industry (e.g. LinkedIn and Meta) and is continuing to do so (see <https://apling.engl.iastate.edu/ph-d-graduates/>).

When teaching her students, Carol is very good at involving them in her research projects to provide them with hands-on research experience. I had the privilege of being her research assistant in the second year of my doctoral studies. In that role, I assisted her with a research project on validating a computer-delivered test of productive grammatical ability. It was in this project that I received training on conducting empirical research, made my debut as her co-presenter at an academic conference (CALICO 2008 in San Francisco), and co-authored my first journal article (Chapelle, Chung, et al., 2010). The experience of shadowing her was so invaluable that her extraordinary work ethic, particularly her relentless pursuit of rigour and tenacity in addressing reviewers' harsh criticisms, is still influencing me today.

The training that Carol offers to her students is not limited to conducting research. She seems keen to prepare them for a wide range of tasks that they will encounter in their future careers. For example, she asked me to assist her in organizing the Technology for Second Language Learning (TSLL) conference in 2007 and editing its proceedings (Chapelle, Chung, et al., 2008). When she was away attending conferences, she invited me to teach her postgraduate courses and helped me get prepared for teaching. She deliberately chose to collaborate with different students each year, so many ALT students had a similar experience to mine.

In addition to training students, Carol makes constant effort to connect them to a wider community of researchers. The annual TSLL conference hosted by ISU is an event initiated by her to serve this purpose. It provides ALT students with an opportunity to meet and present their research in front of established researchers. It is also a venue for junior students to seek inspiration for their doctoral research. It was my encounter with Dr Xiaoming Xi at the TSLL 2007 conference that changed my career trajectory. I was fascinated by her presentation on validating SpeechRater, an automated scoring system for spontaneous L2 speech, and volunteered to edit her conference paper (Xi, 2008). Two years later I seized an opportunity to be her summer research intern at Educational Testing Service to work on a research project for SpeechRater (Xu & Xi, 2010). That project then inspired my doctoral dissertation (Xu, 2015) and paved the way for my current work on automated scoring in Cambridge.

Reflections from Hye-won Lee

In hindsight I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to closely observe (or shadow) Carol, such a distinguished scholar, and learn from her. The seven years I spent as her student and advisee, along with subsequent scholarly collaborations, were invaluable experiences that profoundly shaped both my personal and academic development. While her academic accomplishments are widely recognized and documented across various channels, I would like to use this reflection to highlight other aspects of her character that are less frequently discussed, yet which I was privileged to witness during my close association with her during a segment of her life.

Excellence as a scholar does not always translate into excellence as a teacher, but Carol is a rare individual who excels in both. In each of her courses, she thoughtfully guides students by deconstructing complex ideas into manageable components and organising them in a clear, step-by-step manner to facilitate understanding. She possesses a remarkable ability to empathize with students' perspectives, offering tailored guidance as though she were acutely aware of their specific challenges. Importantly, this does not equate to excessive handholding. Instead, students are afforded a significant degree of autonomy, and her classes are carefully designed to foster genuine motivation, encouraging active participation from all students.

Among those I experienced was one of her signature courses, titled *Validation of Language Assessments*, which I attended in Spring 2012. This graduate-level seminar explored the evolution of validity in educational measurement and language testing, as well as related issues and practices. Some weeks were facilitated by a group of assigned students responsible for guiding the rest of the class through Carol's carefully curated readings. I vividly recall numerous discussions we had in and outside the classroom, reflecting on our interpretations of the readings. Throughout this process, she listened to us with a warm smile; it was only when we appeared to be struggling that she intervened to ensure we had not strayed too far off course. I remain amazed by her ability to discern precisely when to intervene, and I still remember the profound sense of accomplishment and exhilaration I felt after having managed to read Messick (1989) from the first to the last page, a seminal work for language testing researchers known to be quite complex to comprehend—all thanks to her balanced *laissez-faire* style of guidance.

In addition to being a skilled educator who effectively guides her students toward independence, Carol is also an attentive mentor who demonstrates genuine respect by treating each student as an equal partner in discussions and collaborative projects. Raised in East Asian culture where hierarchy is strongly defined by age, title, and social standing, I initially found it inconceivable to engage with her—a distinguished researcher and professor—on equal terms. However, over time, this perspective gradually shifted, largely due to her constant encouragement to challenge my preconceptions through collaborative engagement.

At a time when the argument-based approach to validation was not widely recognized or utilized in the field, I presented my analysis of its interpretations and manifestations, including those articulated in her own work (Chapelle, Enright, et al., 2008) and in Bachman and Palmer (2010), highlighting the similarities and differences between them. She expressed a keen interest in my work and proposed that we collaborate to develop it further into a conference presentation. Thus, a project I completed during my summer internship at a testing organisation led to a paper presentation at the Language Testing Research Colloquium 2013, which later resulted in a co-authored book chapter (Chapelle & Lee, 2021). Throughout this progression of collaborative endeavours, she facilitated

my awareness of the necessity to advocate for my own ideas as an independent researcher, and I gradually began to view her as a colleague with whom I could develop ideas collaboratively. As evidenced by numerous collaborative works produced with her current and former students, along with many subsequent outcomes derived from those, her mentoring approach has significantly contributed to the rich development of the field of applied linguistics.

Above all, however, her genuine curiosity and dedication to the field should be prominently acknowledged, permeating every aspect of her life, whether in professional or personal contexts. A compelling illustration of this occurred during a drive from the international airport to her hotel upon her arrival at an international conference and various events in Seoul. As a local, I had been asked to pick her up and was driving a vehicle equipped with the latest navigation system at the time. While traveling along the motorway, monitored at intervals by speed cameras, the system would make a “ding dang dong” sound each time we passed a camera—a small yet amusing acknowledgment of our compliance with the speed limit. Upon noticing this feature, Carol immediately remarked, “This is indeed an exemplary instance of real-time feedback from automated evaluation!” Although this anecdote could easily be dismissed as a light-hearted joke, it reveals that she is, at her core, a born scholar, who constantly reflects on observation and looks for inspiration for her research. These living examples demonstrated throughout her journey, whether observed on the motorway or in her office, have profoundly resonated with the mindset that her students and colleagues, including myself, should aspire to cultivate.

Beyond her impressive academic accomplishments, evidenced by the extensive collection of books, chapters, and journal articles she has contributed to, she has steadfastly maintained her role as an exemplary teacher, mentor, and role model, committed to nurturing the next generation of applied linguists. I consider myself fortunate to be among those who have benefited from her impactful contributions. As a leading scholar in applied linguistics, may she continue to illuminate our field.

Reflections from Yasin Karatay and Leyla Karatay

Our journeys with Dr Chapelle began in her classes when both of us were drawn to her innovative approach to teaching language assessment. Her teaching style, grounded in empathy and intellectual curiosity, encouraged us to think critically and independently about the best way to integrate technology with language assessment. We learned from her that successful scholars not only conduct rigorous research but also inspire others around them. By sharing our experiences, we hope to illustrate her impact on our academic and professional lives.

Yasin's Perspective

Dr Chapelle encouraged me to try out the argument-based approach to validation in my doctoral dissertation, which developed and validated an English for specific purposes (ESP) speaking test mediated by a spoken dialogue system (Karatay, 2022). Through her guidance, I gained my confidence in using this complex approach, and it has influenced my work ever since. As Dr Chapelle's advisee, I often felt that her feedback on my dissertation was like a masterclass. She combined teaching and mentoring, giving feedback that ranged from minor technicalities, such as the correct way to cite sources, to profound, scope-defining questions that urged me to clarify my research purpose. I remember vividly the moments when she would ask, "What is the issue you are working on that is of interest to the field?" or present a question such as, "Can you expect the generalizability to be as robust when tasks representing a broader domain are included in the assessment?" These were not just questions for me to answer but invitations for me to consider the wider implications of my work.

Dr Chapelle's feedback was not only instructive but also exemplified academic rigor. She explained concepts with clarity, such as "Validation refers to the entire process of drafting the argument, designing the research, collecting data, analysing it, and interpreting results." This explanation revealed the meticulous nature of validation, shaping my understanding of it as a multifaceted and continuous process. Often, her feedback included explicit guidance, such as "A topic or thesis statement could read: 'Three complex issues arise from [problem introduced at the beginning]. First, [state explicitly] + [explain]...'" Her feedback was always constructive and never discouraging. It implicitly taught me how to mentor a doctoral student. Her feedback was timely, arriving often within a week, even when she had numerous other commitments.

One particular challenge I faced was a tight timeline to complete my doctoral dissertation due to visa issues, and her prompt responses made a crucial difference. Her high level of commitment to supervising my dissertation taught me invaluable lessons on prioritisation and time management. Observing her ability to juggle immense responsibilities, I realized the importance of managing my own workload and allocating my time to the most important and urgent things. These lessons continue to influence my work today.

In addition to my dissertation, I had the opportunity to collaborate with Dr Chapelle on a U.S. Department of State-sponsored project, *Using Educational Technology in English Language Classrooms*. This involved designing an eight-week online course for English language teachers worldwide, a complex project with multiple components, from updating lecture scripts to sourcing relevant materials and managing a group of content experts. During the revision process, her mentorship was instrumental. She helped me break down each module into manageable tasks and maintain focus on the sponsor's

deadlines without compromising the quality of the content. Her meticulous organization of the project showed me how to handle multifaceted, high-stakes tasks efficiently.

Dr Chapelle's involvement extended to the production of the course content itself, as she served as the primary lecturer for each module. I had the privilege of watching her prepare scripts that conveyed complex topics in accessible language for language teachers worldwide. She was able to maintain clarity while preserving the depth of the material. Observing her lecturing in the studio, where she adeptly delivered each module as though she were in a live classroom, was an inspiring experience. Her ability to engage with both the content and the camera underscored her dedication to reaching a global audience. Furthermore, her humility was evident when guest lecturers joined; she seamlessly transitioned into a student role for our mock classroom shots. These experiences deeply influenced my own approach to mentorship, online learning design, and effective teaching.

She was also committed to staying on the forefront of research trends, as she often emphasized the role of current technologies and future innovations in applied linguistics. She encouraged us to explore generative AI and fostered our skills through weekly research group meetings that she initiated with doctoral students and faculty. These gatherings became a space for brainstorming, testing, and refining research ideas, leading us to publish a chapter in her e-book, *Exploring AI in Applied Linguistics* (Chapelle et al., 2024), where we examined the potential of ChatGPT versus human raters in assessing L2 writing (Kim et al., 2024). Through this project, we gained insight into her ability to turn initial ideas into structured research thanks to her thought-provoking questions and support.

Leyla's Perspective

I vividly recall my first course with Dr Chapelle during the first year of my Ph.D.—her seminal class on the validation of language assessment. Barely 10 minutes into the lesson, I leaned over to a classmate and whispered, “What does ‘validate’ mean in this context?” As a non-native speaker of English, mastering the language of test validation felt like learning a new dialect of applied linguistics. There were numerous complex concepts and technical terms, each demanding careful attention. At the time, I was also pregnant, and we often joked that one should start learning about validation as early as possible—perhaps even from the womb—to fully grasp its intricacies.

This initial confusion, however, only deepened my admiration for Dr Chapelle, not only as a respected scholar but also as a gifted educator. She had a remarkable way of ensuring we understood the foundational concepts before progressing to more complex discussions. The core of her teaching style was patience and inclusivity; never once did she dismiss a question as trivial or respond with a blunt “No, that’s wrong.” Instead, she would pause thoughtfully and say, “Hmm, that’s interesting,” gently guiding us to explore

further and encouraging us to uncover our misunderstandings ourselves. This approach fostered both intellectual curiosity and a commitment to self-directed learning, both of which are values I have carried into my own teaching.

Dr Chapelle's influence on my work extended beyond the classroom as well. Her insights into validation frameworks helped me appreciate the rigour required to ensure reliability in language assessments. Her emphasis on validation underscored how essential it is for maintaining the accuracy of scores and the integrity of rating scales, insights I applied directly to two of my own projects examining rating scale effectiveness. These projects benefited from her approach to assessment design, which always prioritised thoroughness and precision, setting a standard I strive to maintain in my own work.

Another aspect of Dr Chapelle's character that left a lasting impression was her humility and openness. She once shared a draft of her own book (Chapelle, 2021) with us, inviting our feedback. It was a rare opportunity for us to witness her commitment to collaborative learning and her respect for students' perspectives. Being trusted with a draft of her work felt like a profound privilege that shows her generosity as a mentor.

Beyond the formal classroom, I had the unique experience of being a fellow student alongside Dr Chapelle. In 2019, I enrolled in a course on Systemic Functional Linguistics, and to my surprise, Dr Chapelle attended each session throughout the semester, participating with the same enthusiasm as any other student. It was inspiring to witness someone of her stature actively engage with new material. This literally illustrated the idea that learning is a lifelong process. When I later presented a project integrating Systemic Functional Linguistics with the argument-based approach to validation, she missed the presentation due to a scheduling conflict. Yet, she followed up with a personal email expressing genuine interest, even suggesting we meet so I could share my work with her directly. Knowing how demanding her schedule was, I was deeply moved by this gesture. Her commitment to her students' growth extended well beyond the confines of her responsibilities.

At conferences and professional gatherings, Dr Chapelle's reputation was equally evident. Scholars from various institutions would often rearrange their schedules just to meet her, and the admiration they expressed was palpable. For me, being associated with her felt like an immense honour, a unique privilege that has opened doors in the academic community.

Conclusion

Through the anecdotes and reflections gathered in this paper, we were able to build a fuller profile of Dr Chapelle from the lens of her former students. On top of her outstanding academic achievements in areas such as CALL, CALT, and validity theory and validation practices in language assessment, her contributions to applied linguistics also lie in the training of and role modelling for the next generation of applied linguists. Her

dedication to helping fledging researchers grow, relentless pursuit of rigour, diligence, humility, and genuine interest in improving language teaching, learning and assessment through innovative technologies have inspired us (and probably other ALT students and alumni) to follow her path and continue to tackle the two problems that intrigued her. We feel truly blessed to have had the opportunity to study and work with Carol, who introduced us to the fascinating field of applied linguistics.

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