

Assessment Specialist



Name: **Carmen Luna**

Profession: **Assessment Specialist**

Number of years in this line of work: **12 years**

Native Language: **Spanish**

Other Language(s): **English, French (conversational), (poorly)**

1) What languages do you know? How did you learn them? (At home, At school, etc.)

I was born in Dominican Republic so my first language is Spanish. Then, when I was in high school, I went to a private institute to learn English to complement the EFL classes I was taking in school that required you to prove you were fluent in two languages: Spanish and English. I then completed a BA in modern languages. The emphasis was to become a translator/interpreter. For the last two years, I learned French in the program and for my last year I needed to take on a fourth language. After graduating, I felt I needed to improve my German and went to Germany to take a few months.

Afterwards I came back to the Dominican Republic and by that time I was teaching English. The main population was from Italy so I had to use Italian for work purposes. I did just learned it through conversations with the customers. I moved to the United States where English was the language of instruction. But, I have been able to continue using several languages in my professional life, with my friends or when I travel.

2) What is your profession?

I work for Educational Testing Service in the Assessment Development Division. I work on tests that develop tests in many different languages (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Hebrew, Arabic, etc.), little on German and French tests, I am mainly involved with Spanish and ESL tests. My main purposes: to measure language proficiency, to connect high school and college language programs, to certify language teachers, etc. Some of the programs I work on are: Placement Spanish Language, Advanced Placement Spanish Literature, CLEP College Spanish.

Assessment specialists work with test development committees, which are often high level. We develop content specifications for the exams. Besides, we train outside consultants to write the questions to make sure that they measure what is intended. We also work on publications such as study guides, course description and teacher's guides.

3) Describe a "typical" day as an Assessment Specialist. How do you use your language skills?

Since the role of an assessment specialist encompasses so many different activities, a typical day varies depending on the project you are working on at given time. I work on assembly of the test such as putting together questions, and making sure only a single answer to each question is correct. I also I often means I need to be able to work internationally, for example we often use authentic materials from Spanish speaking country and we need to obtain the copyright permission for it. If I am in the US I might use only Spanish, but if it is in another country with a monolingual English speaking population our meetings with the test development committee members are conducted in the target language.

4) What do you enjoy about it?

I enjoy working with people who come from diverse backgrounds and who share a love for language. The tests and assessments we develop do make an impact at several levels: they have educational goals because a person can prove that he/she knows another language; they can also help students who need to get information about their students; and they can influence curriculum at the university level. My work is particularly evident at the present time when there are some many changes in the field.

In addition, I enjoy the variety of tasks we perform since we need to utilize several skills that are needed in my job such as interpersonal skills because I need to communicate with others; however, other tasks require more detail-oriented skills. It is important to make sure the quality of the publication and I often consult others or use reference books to verify information.

5) What language do you think in?

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I think in English or in Spanish but sometimes I don't know. Since most of the time I switch back and forth between the two. Later I often have to ask myself what language I was using; if I am focused on learning a particular language I will think in it, such as French or German. I am involved in just English and Spanish.

6) What do you think helped you the most in mastering the foreign/second language?

Not being afraid to make mistakes. I was always able to ask people "Is this right?" I was always in the right way. I also enjoy reading, which helps with learning new vocabulary.

When I went to Germany, I had to use the language all the time at the institute. In an international school, students were from many different countries and parts of the world and had to communicate in. My roommate was from Italy and since she didn't know Spanish, we had to communicate in English.

7) What opportunities have knowing another language provided in your life, other than in the classroom?

The reason why I studied languages was to study archeology. I needed to do it outside of the classroom to learn another language. Although that was my original purpose, since then I have used my language skills as a translator, teacher, and travel agent. Knowing another language has allowed me to have been able to enjoy traveling to many countries and being able to communicate with the people that live there.

8) If you had the time to learn another language now, what language would you choose to learn?

When I was doing my masters at Teachers College, one of the requirements was to learn a new alphabet. So I took a class in Korean, which I enjoyed although it was just an exploration. I would like to learn Chinese or Arabic. I've traveled to China and Egypt, and I regret not having learned those languages beyond simple greetings. I believe that traveling to a foreign country is immensely rewarding and it allows you to communicate with the people that live there.

9) How do you think your life would have turned out if you had never learned a second language?

Very different. If I hadn't learned another language, I would have never come to the United States. I would not enjoy traveling as much as I do. Besides, I would have probably stayed mainly in the United States and the world would have been limited to whatever is available there.

10) In your opinion, are there more career opportunities for people who are bilingual?

Definitely. I come from a country where you need to be bilingual to have a better chance in the tourism industry. If you want to work in a hotel or in a multinational company, being bilingual is a big advantage. People who want better jobs will pay for private classes, after school or work, for an hour or two.

11) What do you think you would be doing if you weren't an Assessment Specialist?

Most probably I would be teaching ESL or Spanish. However, originally I wanted to be an archeologist and study ancient civilizations in Latin America. I am not thinking of doing that now, but I would do it if I had the chance.

12) What advice would you give to somebody who wants to be an Assessment Specialist? What languages should they learn?

To be an Assessment Specialist for a foreign language test, one has to be very proficient in the language and have experience in language learning and language development. It is helpful, although not essential, to have a background in psychology to work here you are given courses on test design, psychometric issues, item analysis, and test theory expertise.

The languages that are needed most now are Spanish, Mandarin and Japanese.

13) Any additional information:

It is important to emphasize commonalities of different cultures. As someone who has lived in different parts of the world, I believe that there is something essential to being a human being that transcends these similarities. There may be differences in traditions, history and food, but how we think and feel is pretty much the same everywhere.

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