

**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), Italian (conversational), German (poorly),



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

I was born in Dominican Republic so my first language is Spanish. Then, when I was twelve or thirteen, I started to attend a private institute to learn English to complement the EFL classes I was taking in school. In college, I enrolled in two programs that required you to prove you were fluent in two languages: Spanish and English. First, I became a bilingual secretary. Later, I completed a BA in modern languages. The emphasis was to become a translator/interpreter and/or teacher. During my college years, I learned French in the program and for my last year I needed to take on a fourth language, which for me was German. After graduating, I felt I needed to improve my German and went to Germany to take some language courses for about six months.

Afterwards I came back to the Dominican Republic and by that time I was teaching ESL. I also worked for a travel agency where the main population was from Italy so I had to use Italian for work purposes. I did not have any formal education in Italian; I just learned it through conversations with the customers. I moved to the United States to attend graduate school; therefore, English was the language of instruction. But, I have been able to continue using several of the languages I learned either through 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 with a group of assessment specialists that develop tests in many different languages (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Hebrew, Italian, Latin, etc.). Although I have worked a little on German and French tests, I am mainly involved with Spanish and ESL tests. The tests we develop are used for several purposes: to measure language proficiency, to connect high school and college language instruction, to use as placement into a language program, to certify language teachers, etc. Some of the programs I work on include the SAT Subject Tests, Advanced Placement Spanish Language, Advanced Placement Spanish Literature, CLEP College Spanish, Praxis II, etc.

Assessment specialists work with test development committees, which are often high school teachers or college professors, to develop content specifications for the exams. Besides, we train outside consultants to create questions for the tests and we review the questions to make sure that they measure what is intended. We also work on publications related to the testing programs, such as study guides, course description and teacher's guides.

### **3) Describe a "typical" day as an Assessment Specialist. How do you use your languages in your work?**

Since the role of an assessment specialist encompasses so many different activities, a typical day may differ depending on the project you are working on at given time. I work on assembly of the test such as putting the questions together, reviewing questions, and making sure only a single answer to each question is correct. I also look for source materials for the tests. This often means I need to be able to work internationally, for example we often use authentic materials, published originally in a Spanish speaking country and we need to obtain the copyright permission for it. If I am speaking or writing to someone outside the US I might use only Spanish, but if it is in the US with a monolingual English speaker, I will speak in English. Most parts of our meetings with the test development committee members are conducted in the target language, too.

### **4) What do you enjoy about it?**

I enjoy working with people who come from diverse backgrounds and who share a love for languages and cultures. Besides, the tests and assessments we develop do make an impact at several levels: they have an impact on a individual learner's educational goals because a person can prove that he/she knows another language; they can also be of benefit to an institution or school that needs to get information about their students; and they can influence curriculum at a national level. And the importance of our work is particularly evident at the present time when there are some many changes going on in the foreign language field.

In addition, I enjoy the variety of tasks we perform since we need to utilize several skills in our daily routine. There are many important skills that are needed in my job such as interpersonal skills because I need to be able to work as a part of a team; however, other tasks require more detail-oriented skills. It is important to make sure that everything is correct on a test or as the editor of the publication and I often consult others or use reference books to verify information or data.

### **5) What language do you think in?**

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

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

Not being afraid to make mistakes. I was always able to ask people "Is this right?" I was never too concerned about saying things 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. Immersion was helpful, and being at an international school, students were from many different countries and parts of the world, so German was the language to communicate in. My roommate was from Italy and since she didn't know Spanish, we communicated in German.

**7) What opportunities have knowing another language provided in your career that you may not have had otherwise?**

The reason why I studied languages was to study archeology. I needed to do it outside the Dominican Republic, so I needed to learn another language. Although that was my original purpose, since then I have used foreign languages in my other jobs as a translator, teacher, and travel agent. Knowing another language has allowed me to switch careers easily. At a personal level, I have been able to enjoy traveling to many countries and being able to communicate with people in their own language.

**8) If you had the time to learn another language now, what language would it be? Why?**

When I was doing my masters at Teachers College, one of the requirements was to attend a class that didn't use the western alphabet. So I took a class in Korean, which I enjoyed although it was just an exploratory class only for a weekend. Now, I would like to learn Chinese or Arabic. I've traveled to China and Egypt, and I regret not having been able to communicate with the locals beyond simple greetings. I believe that traveling to a foreign country is immensely more pleasant and enjoyable when you are able to communicate with the people that live there.

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

Very different. If I hadn't learned another language, I would have never come to the US to attend school. I wouldn't be able to enjoy traveling as much as I do. Besides, I would have probably stayed mainly in the Dominican Republic and my vision of the world would have been limited to whatever is available there.

**10) In your opinion, are there more career opportunities for people who speak two or more languages?**

Definitely. I come from a country where you need to be bilingual to have a better chance of getting into a well paid job, especially in the tourism industry. If you want to work in a hotel or in a multinational company you need Spanish and English. Many people who want better jobs will pay for private classes, after school or work, for an hour or more a day, just to learn another language.

**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 archaeologist to study pre-Columbian civilizations in Latin America. I am not thinking of doing that now, but I would do it as a hobby for sure.

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

To be an Assessment Specialist for a foreign language test, one has to be very proficient in that language as well as know about language learning and language development. It is helpful, although not essential, to know how to interpret data. When you come to work here you are given courses on test design, psychometric issues, item analysis and statistics to expand your subject 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 moved around a lot and seen different parts of the world, I believe that there is something essential to being a human being and there would be fewer problems if we saw these similarities. There may be differences in traditions, history and food, but how we relate to other people, our relationships, is pretty much the same everywhere.