LANGUAGE TESTING VS LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to provide information about the methods of foreign language teaching /learning are currently practiced today. The evolution of language testing is inevitably linked with the evolution of language teaching.

Keywords: testing, teaching, English, interaction, skills.

I. Assessments as an integral part of teaching and learning

Assessments is an integral part of teaching and learning, but it should be subordinated to both'. (Bailey, 1998). Thus, we can consider evaluation as both the starting point and end of this process. The main purpose of language assements is to help us, teachers, to gather as much information as possible about our students' language abilities and therefore how successful our teaching has been, what areas need to be taught. Quality assessment will encourage our students to take learning seriously and provide them with series of learning goals to aim towards. In order to make appropriate decisions about our teaching, we need information about our students' language abilities. The purpose of this paper is to provide information about the methods of foreign language teaching /learning are currently practiced today.

As a language teacher I must always make decisions all the time. Some of my decisions are relatively minor ones. Other decisions have more profound implications because there are many techniques of assessing students 'performance. We should test our students in such a way that it enhances further learning and motivation. The evolution of language testing is inevitably linked with the evolution of language teaching.

I have always taken into consideration not only the role of the teacher but also the role of my students in teaching/learning process and not only the nature of student-teacher interaction but also the nature of student-student interaction. The roles are very traditional. The teacher is the authority in the classroom and the students do as he/she says so they can learn what he knows. In order for the method to be successful, the students must trust and respect him/her. The teacher and the students should be more likely partners in the teaching/learning process. The teacher attempts to increase his/her students' confidence that they will be successful learners. The more confident the students feel, the better they will learn. They feel less inhibited since their performance is really that of different person.

Learning a foreign language will always help students grow intellectually. A fundamental purpose of learning a foreign language is to be able to read its literature because literary language is superior to spoken language. To do this, students need to learn about the grammar rules and vocabulary of the target language. We tend to evaluate grammar and vocabulary more because these two are easier to test, but it is more important to assess skills as well as language in order to develop their abilities.

An important goal is for students to be able to translate each language into another because they are considered successful language learners. The primary skills to be developed are

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reading and writing. Vocabulary is emphasized over grammar. Students should be conscious of grammatical rules of the target language: the verb conjugations and other grammatical paradigms should be committed to memory although work on all four skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) occurs from start, oral communication is seen as basic. When we learn a second language, we learn to communicate with other people. I strongly consider that when our students write, they also have a chance to be adventurous.

Moreover, when they write, they become more involved with the new language. They realize a real need for finding the right word in the right sentence. The close relationship between writing and thinking makes writing a valuable part of any language course. It is important to remember while planning a writing lesson that students can interact with each other at all points in the process: before they write, while they are writing, and after they have written. A student who takes a test at the beginning of a semester and at its end will record different results, but these differences must show differences in his/her skills and not inaccuracies in the test.

II. Testing Grammar and Vocabulary

Testing the students 'mastery of grammatical elements should be kept in any proficiency tests. It is important to test their writing abilities. Here are some techniques for testing structures which are most widely-used by teachers and testers:

- Multiple-choice
- Modified cloze
- Text completion
- Paraphrase

The same reasons for testing grammar apply to testing vocabulary. It is important to notice the range of vocabulary the students have learned while skills are being tested. The items of vocabulary used in the test should be chosen according to their frequency and importance in communication. Gap-filling (words written separately and at random in a separate box/ the words to complete the sentences or text should be derived from words given on the right) can be an example for testing vocabulary.

III. Testing listening comprehension

Test of reading and listening requires little writing or no writing at all and should focus on students' comprehension of the main message not on the details. Note-taking is the only writing which allowed to be used whole testing listening.

Listening test items should include:

- Listening for specific information
- Listening for gist
- Following directions
- Following instructions

Naturally, students must not have access to the typescript. The text should be unknown to them but the topic must be familiar, in accordance with the topic though. Students should use the time to work out the topic and decide what sort of information and answers they need to listen for.

IV. Testing reading comprehension

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Reading in the target language should be taught from the beginning. The reading skill will be developed through practice with speaking. Students should learn to think in the target language as soon as possible. Vocabulary is acquired more naturally if students use it in full sentences, rather than memorizing word lists.

Language is primarily spoken, not written. Lessons should contain some conversational activity – some opportunity for students to use language in real contexts and be encouraged to speak as much as possible. Students are taught to translate from one language to another. Often what they translate are readings in the target language about some features of the culture of the foreign language community.

Testing reading skills should be given an equal place to that of speaking or writing for example.

The reading skills we want to test are:

- Skimming to obtain the general idea of the text
- Scanning to locate specific information in a text
- Identifying the stages of an argument
- Identifying examples in support of the argument in the topic sentence
- Identifying the meaning of words using in the text as context
- Understanding the text structure.

Some of the test items should be:

- **Close or modified close** consists of a short text with one or two paragraphs which contain gaps that students are requested to fill in with one word that grammatically and logically completes it.
- **Summary close –** students are asked to fill in the gaps of the summary with a word or a short phrase from the original text: the words chosen to complete the gaps refer to relevant information in the text.
- **Information transfer –** the text to be used for such a test item has to be descriptive of a person, pace, process, route, picture, statistics, etc.: students are require to label a drawing/picture/map/graph or fill in a grid.
- **Identifying order of events/topics/arguments –** the text for this item contains a larger number of paragraphs which are numbered; the text is followed by a number of main ideas/arguments in random order which are to be found in each paragraph plus extra one; students are required to match the number of the paragraph with the main idea.
- **Matching titles paragraphs or short texts –** this test item consists of a number of short texts followed by a number of titles. Students should match the paragraphs with the titles.
- **Identifying referents** – the given text is followed by a series of questions such as: “What does the word “it” refer to?
- **Guessing meaning of unfamiliar words from the context –** this test is similar with the previous one, but the students have to find the word of the same grammatical category with the give word, for example: “item”.
- **Gapped text –** the text contains gaps numbered 1, 2, etc. to be filled in with whole sentences; the missing sentences and an extra one are given in a jumbled order after the text and are labelled A, B, etc.; students are required to match the number of the

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gaps with the letters corresponding to the sentences; there will be a letter which will not be used.

- **Find information –** this test item contains a number of very short texts labelled A, B, etc., generally grouped around a main topic, and a number of questions. Students must answer the questions by writing the letter corresponding to the text in the spaces provided.

V. Testing speaking

In real life speaking is most often associated with listening, since speaking is a two-way process, involving a listener. As comprehension of spoken language is assessed through listening tests, the production of spoken language is assessed through a variety of speaking test items.

During a test of speaking students must give proof of their communicative competency which is sum total of number of separate components: use a range of various structures, appropriate vocabulary, accuracy, pronunciation, fluency, coherence and cohesion of their discourse, interaction abilities.

VI. Testing writing

The use of writing gets students to go beyond those sentence exercises, so that they write

1. To communicate with the reader
2. To express ideas without the pressure of face-to-face communication
3. To explore a subject
4. To record experience

To become familiar with the conventions of written English discourse.

In order to produce a piece of writing, we have to deal with:

1. SYNTAX
   - Sentence structure
   - Sentence boundaries
   - Stylistic choices
2. GRAMMAR
   - Rules for verbs
   - Agreement
   - Articles
   - Pronouns
3. MECHANICS
   - Handwriting
   - Spelling
   - Punctuation
4. ORGANIZATION
   - Paragraphs
   - Topic and support
   - Cohesion
   - Unity
5. WORD CHOICE
   - Vocabulary

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- Idiom
- Tone

6. PURPOSE
   - The reason for writing
7. Audience
   - The readers
8. THE WRITER'S PROCESS
   - Getting ideas
   - Getting started
   - Writing drafts
   - Revising
9. CONTENT
   - Relevance
   - Clarity
   - Originality
   - Logic

Types of writing tests

1. **Cloze/modified –** the modified cloze test used in the CAE examination focuses on both reading and writing
2. **Error correction/proof-reading/editing –** the students are asked to rewrite only the necessary corrections.
3. **Form – filling**
4. **Relaying a message –** students are given a listening passage of a telephone conversation or its transcript and are asked to write down a message in note form
5. **Creating a text from given notes** - students are given a set of notes and are asked to write a letter/report/essay/article depending on the task
6. **Responding to a given context or situation –** students should explain in detail the situation.
7. **Information transfer -** students are given a map/diagram/pictures and are asked to write the description/report/article/instructions based on the given visual
8. **Opinion/For-and-Against Essays** – students are given a controversial topic and are asked to take a position or to present a balanced one and bring arguments to sustain their opinions.
9. **Writing the given topics** – students are asked to write freely about a given topic
10. **Free composition (narrative, description)**

It is very important to notice if the students:

- Use a wide range of grammatical structures correctly
- Use a variety of connecting words
- The style is right for this type of writing
- Has ideas clearly organised in paragraphs
- Use a wide range of vocabulary correctly
- Answers the questions fully and with some original points

I totally consider that any piece of writing should be marked taking into consideration all aspects of communicative writing, not only grammatical accuracy or faultless speaking.

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VII. Alternative types of evaluation

Portfolio assessment. Portfolio is a systematic collection of the student's work and other information about the students. The portfolio should enable the teacher to judge students achievement. Portfolio assessment is systematic and can illustrate students' progress, provides visible evidence of the students 'progress, is accessible and focused and efficient.

Projects, either individual or group, imply lots of revision/recycling, learning from others and from the materials which are used. To score the students 'oral presentation, we can use marking scales for testing speaking skills to which we can add descriptors for oral presentations.

Self-Evaluation is a complex mental process useful in any learning event. Students performing self-evaluation understand their goals for learning, monitor their success in achieving those goals, reviewed the mental process they have used to learn the content in order to get the desired results.

A large part of this paper has been dedicated to practical suggestions for those who have to cope with the lack of coursebooks and other published materials in order to stimulate teachers' creative potential.

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