
EVOLUTION HISTORY OF LANGUAGE TESTING AND ASSESSMENT

Kamola Muradkasimova*

*Researcher,

Uzbek State World Languages University,

UZBEKISTAN

Email id: kmuradkasimova@yahoo.com

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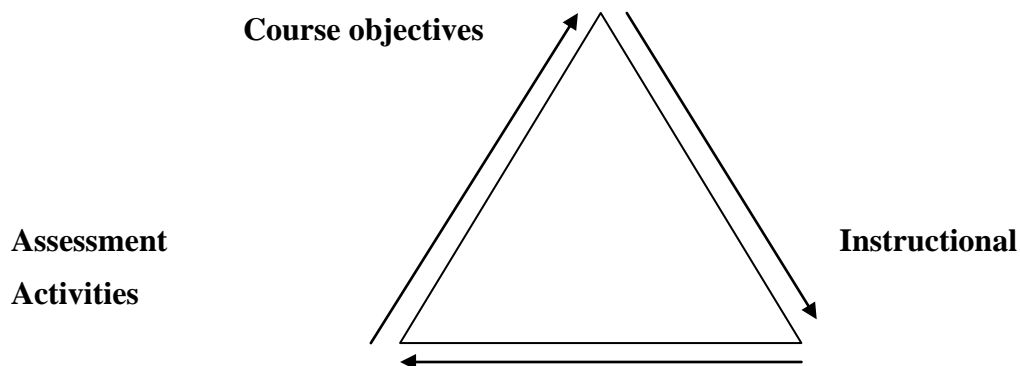
ABSTRACT

The following article describes the important role of assessment in language teaching and learning. The paper begins with the importance of aligning learning objectives, instructional activities and assessment, the evolution of language teaching and language testing, necessity of language assessment. Also, the following paper provides information on techniques and features of three generation approaches in language teaching and language testing.

KEYWORDS: *Assessment, Evolution Of Language Tests, Objective, Subjective, Contextualized, Authentic, Disembodied.*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning foreign language became the necessity of modern world. In educational sphere the great attention is paid to the development of teaching/learning process of foreign languages. Different forms of seminars, workshops and training courses are organized at the variety of institutions and levels to develop areas such as professional development, teachers training, material designing and others. Much work was done to experience implementing new methodology in foreign language teaching. New methods, techniques and approaches help to develop learners' knowledge, habits and skills in foreign language. Today's methodology requires implementing authentic tasks and using authentic language, so that learners are able to transfer it to the real life communication. This process requires teachers to develop and run their lessons effectively, where learning objectives, instructional activities and assessment are aligned. This triangle plays great role in teaching, learning and assessment of foreign language learners.



Assessment is an integral part of the language learning process. Thus, it is very important to be assessment literate and design successful assessment tasks. As, clear assessment is the base for classroom administering and scoring, aiding instructional decisions, communicating results to stakeholders, and being aware of inappropriate and unethical uses of tests (Fulcher, 2012, p.115) [1]. So, we may say that assessment is the worldwide attribute of social life. Throughout history people have been put to test to prove their capabilities or to establish their credentials (TimMcNamara, 2000, p.3) [2]. The Russian scientist V.S. Avanesov states that “any action done to find out the origin of the tests is equal with the attempt to find the beginning of the river”. This clearly demonstrates that using tests go to long history. Scientists state that there is no concrete date of the test origin. Hence, from the early history people try to show their capabilities, skills and compete with each other. Sure, each attempt was evaluated and assessed by others. Tests to see how a person performs particularly in relation to a threshold of performance have become important social institutions and fulfill a gatekeeping function in that they control entry to many important social roles. So, we may confidently say that testing and assessment exist with the appearance of mankind. The most common and obvious distinction between how language testing is used mostly defined: between objective (right/wrong) and subjective (judgmental) assessment techniques. It is more useful to see this distinction in historical context, because language testing and language teaching go parallel through history, therefore any changes in language teaching effects language testing. Hence, assessment should provide us, the teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders with the evidence of how well the students have learned what was intended them to learn. Let us see the evolution of language testing which was provided by Richard West. It is common to see the evolution of both language teaching and language testing since the second world war. They fall into three generations:

1 generation- grammar/translation approach

2 generation- audio-lingual/structural approach

3 generation- communicative approach

It is usually said that language testing lags behind language teaching. Thus, these three generations of language teaching are parallel to the generations of language testing. Many writers and specialists on language teaching and assessment agree with these generations, but they do not agree with how they should be called. Even though, the writers suggest different names for the generations, the content stays the same.

First generation tests. Richard West agrees with Spolsky on referring first generation as “traditional”, as teaching and testing was based on translation from L1 to TL. The common techniques which were used to assess the learners were: translation of passages (mostly literary texts) from and into target language, endless compositions without context and which were based on product-oriented writing (eg. Write 150 words about hobby), and oral interviews which often asks questions without meaning and sequence. Considering all mentioned above, let us make some conclusions about first generation tests.

Tasks were not authentic. Sure we always use translation in real life, but we do not translate literary extracts. In addition when we write and speak there should be a purpose. However, we can not see the existence of purpose in the first generation.

This generation tasks and test techniques do not have context. When we write some words about one topic e do not know *why* we are writing, *who* we are writing it for, and *how* are we supposed to write it because of this we are lack of information about the appropriate language which will be suitable to this context.

The scoring was **subjective**, which required assessor to make own judgments based on personal opinion and experience. On this basis, we may say that language testing and assessment was not reliable.

Second generation tests. Second generation assessment techniques were set out to eliminate the shortcomings of the first generation, especially the problems with subjectivity. Therefore some ways of assessing language on right-wrong basis were explored. These techniques were considered much reliable and fair, because the results of experiment showed that the assessment could be replicated and show the same result. Such factors who assessed the item, when it was assessed and the mood of the assessor did not matter. This illustrates that second generation test items may be marked by people who were not teachers of English, or do not understand English. Also they could be marked by computers. The most common and famous test item was multiple choice (MCQ). Comparing with first generation and considering all mentioned above, we may state that second generation tests have the following characteristics.

The techniques of the second generation were all **objective**, it was done to get rid of the shortcoming of the first generation items which were all **subjective**.

Second generation techniques, multiple choices, is even more disembodied than the first generation one. There is no any context in multiple choice questions, and that is a big problem, because distracters may confuse or penalize better students who have broader knowledge and imagination to see other possibilities.

The same with authenticity. The second generation tests are less authentic than the first generation tests were. It is obvious that we do not make choices in the real world communication, especially language choices. So, this type of tests do not prepare students to real life language use.

Third-generation tests. The main aim of communicative teaching and communicative testing is the use of real word situations. The quote which was presented by Carroll (1982) clearly sets out the aim of communicative approach.

The third generation approach was the real reaction against the previous generation approach. Here are some characteristics of the third generation tests.

We may say that third generation techniques are always as much authentic as possible, Authenticity refers to both texts (texts were selected from real life sources: newspaper, radio, lecture and ect.) and tasks (tasks attempt to stimulate language tasks which are needed in real life). Perhaps, total authenticity is impossible, but learners at least will be able to use the language which is relevant to the situation beyond the classroom.

Because the third generation tests are attempting to be authentic and elicit language as it should be used in real life, all third generation techniques are **contextualized**. For example ESP students coming from their specialization, required to produce that skills that are required in their future content.

As third generation tasks are concerned with all four skills, it should assess all four skills in integrated way. It is obvious that listening and reading can be assessed objectively, but there no way to assess speaking and writing objectively. So, the main task of testers was to improve the reliability of subjective assessment. The improvements are seen in the form of: using more than one assessor, frequent retraining of assessor, and use of banding descriptors.

As we have mentioned earlier, language testing lags behind language teaching, depending on the methodology and tasks which are applied, assessment techniques are designed. Therefore, at the beginning of the article we have mentioned that aligning course objectives, instructional tasks and assessment is very important. [3] To simplify the whole information presented in the article, we present the following table.

In conclusion we would like to stress that, teaching and learning is the most basic processes that people have had since their existence. And, assessment always goes parallel to teaching and learning whether formally or informally. The results that assessment and tests show, gives purposeful shape for the teaching, developing syllabus and curriculum. Thus, it is very important for teachers to be assessment literate and have both theoretical and practical knowledge of assessment.

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