Testing and Evaluation: A Significant Characteristic of Language Learning and Teaching

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Abstract

This paper deals with Testing and Evaluation which is an important aspect of the process of language learning and teaching. A Linguistics approach to language teaching is a scientific and objective approach and is based on the theoretical knowledge of Linguistics. Since language testing involves language, one cannot ignore the assumptions of Linguistics. Linguistics has to offer many things to the teaching of native and foreign languages. Similarly it is also recognized that Linguistics can be of great help in evolving the methodology of the construction of language tests.

Key Words: Testing & Evaluation, Language Learning & Teaching, Measuring, Examination, Various type of test etc.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
12 : 1 January 2012
Md. Motiur Rahman, Ph.D. and Arvind Kumar Gautam, M.A., NET 432
Testing and Evaluation: A Significant Characteristic of Language Learning and Teaching

Introduction

       Testing and evaluation has attracted much attention of the Scholars of Linguistics as well as language teachers. Much research has been done in this particular area. There have been revolutionary changes in the method & procedure of language testing. Research has been conducted in order to find out a scientific and standard method for language testing. Various linguists have suggested the measures which one has to take into account while constructing a language test.

There are various requirements of a test, without which a test cannot be considered a valid and standard. Ingram (1974:319) observes that the search for 'objective' testing methods is the direct out come of dissatisfaction with the unreliability of the marking of traditional examinations.

Objective Type of Tests

Tests are set up so as to eliminate any differences in results due to variations in the judgment of one marker at different times. The objective type test derives its name from the objectivity in scoring. Since there is only one correct answer to such a test and since in most cases the answer is given along with the test and the candidate is simply required to indicate the correct answer with a tick or a number, the subjective judgment of the examiner cannot vitiate the scoring. As far as scoring is concerned, these tests are highly reliable.

Some of the popular types of objective type tests are: Constant-Alternative, Rearrangement type, Multiple-Choice type, Matching type, True-False type, Yes/No Answer type, Completion type (Fill-in the blank type) etc.

Objective Type Tests versus Traditional Tests

       The objective type tests have certain distinct advantages over the traditional essay type tests, i.e. (a) objective type tests can cover a large area of syllabus in a relatively short time and (b) objective type tests can be scored easily & objectively.

       Traditionally, the system of evaluation was subjective in nature. Bhat (1992) is of the view that the present examination system is conducted to determine fail or pass of the participants. The examinations test the knowledge of textbooks and the competence of the teacher rather than the competence of the student. Major portions of syllabus are deleted while setting up question papers. This infused a stigma of "Choice Making" on the part of learners and the aim is only to pass the examination rather than master the course. This contributed to the degeneration of the evaluation system.

       A subjective test is based on an opinion or judgment on the part of examiner, which is expected to match with that of an examinee. It involves more of memorization

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
12 : 1 January 2012
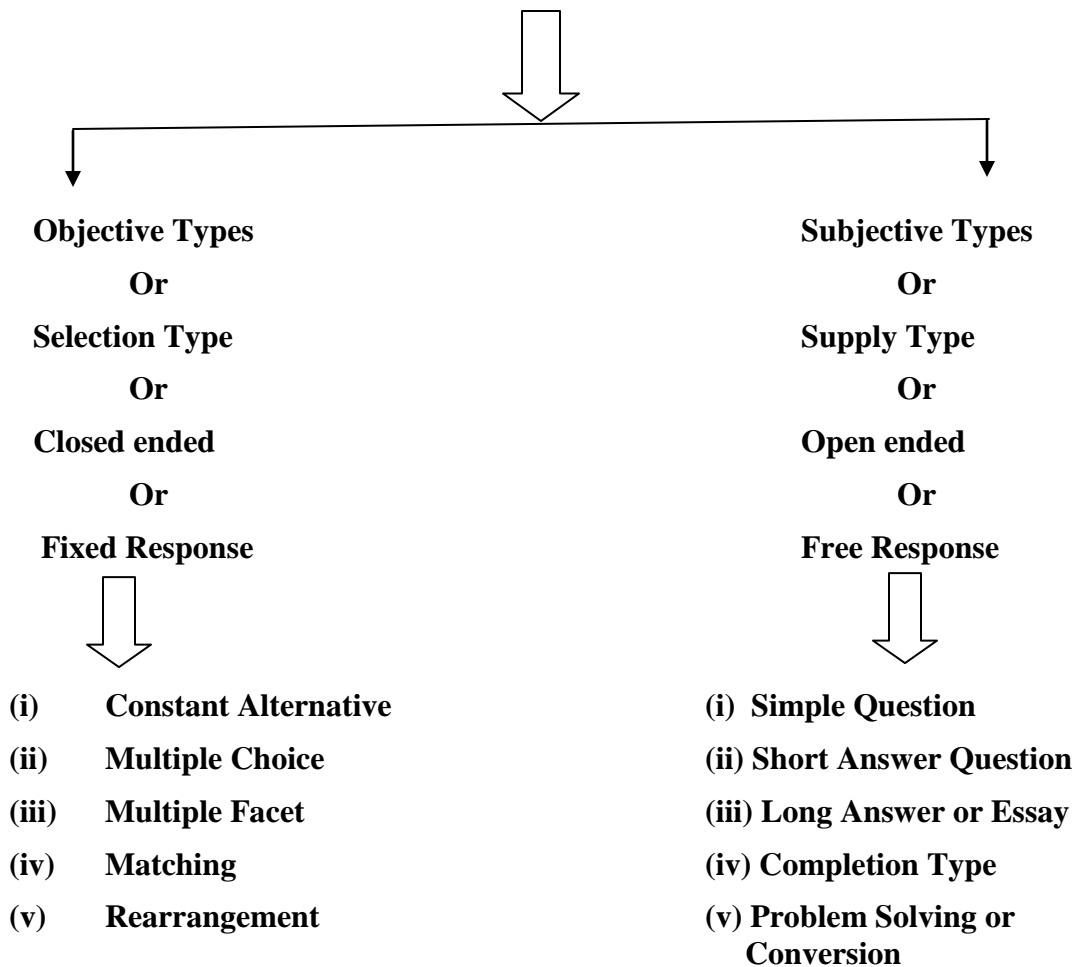Md. Motiur Rahman, Ph.D. and Arvind Kumar Gautam, M.A., NET   433
Testing and Evaluation: A Significant Characteristic of Language Learning and Teaching

on the part of learner, while an objective test is scored mechanically and involves measurement.

Some of the popular types of Subjective type tests are: Simple Question type, Short Answer type, Long Answer type, Problem solving, Completion etc. They are shown given below:

Item Types

Objective Types	Subjective Types
Or	**Or**
Selection Type	**Supply Type**
Or	**Or**
Closed ended	**Open ended**
Or	**Or**
Fixed Response	**Free Response**

(i)	**Constant Alternative**	**(i)**	**Simple Question**
(ii)	**Multiple Choice**	**(ii)**	**Short Answer Question**
(iii)	**Multiple Facet**	**(iii)**	**Long Answer or Essay**
(iv)	**Matching**	**(iv)**	**Completion Type**
(v)	**Rearrangement**	**(v)**	**Problem Solving or Conversion**

Review of Literature

Testing, Evaluation and Examination

Testing has been described by the scholars of the Linguistics as a "device" or "instrument", which measures the linguistic knowledge or competence of the learners.

A test has been defined as a "measuring device". Measurement is the process of assigning numerical value to the response for a given task to each of the members or a set of objects or group of persons normally examinees.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
12 : 1 January 2012
Md. Motiur Rahman, Ph.D. and Arvind Kumar Gautam, M.A., NET   434
Testing and Evaluation: A Significant Characteristic of Language Learning and Teaching

Ingram (1974:313) is of the view that "tests, like examinations, invite candidates to display their knowledge or skills in a concentrated fashion, so that the result can be graded, and inferences made from the standard of performance that can be expected from the candidate, either at the time of the test or at some future time". A test is conducted to measure the knowledge of an individual and to compare him with other individuals who belong to the same group.

According to Carrol (1965: 364), "the purpose of testing is always to render information to aid in making intelligent decisions about possible courses of action. Some times these decisions affect only the future design or used of the tests themselves, in which case we are dealing with solely experimental uses of tests. Some times the decisions have to do with the retention or alteration of courses of training, as when one decides that poor tests results are due to in effective training".

Pit Corder (1973:351) is of the view that "language tests are measuring instruments and they are applied to learners, not to the teaching materials or teachers. For this reason they do not tell us 'directly' about the contribution of the 'teacher' or the 'materials' to the learning process. They are designed to measure the learners 'knowledge of' or 'competence' in the language at particular moment in his course and nothing else. The knowledge of one pupil may be compared with the knowledge of others or with that of the same pupil at a different time, or with same standard or norm, as in the case of height, weight, temperature etc."

According to Halliday, et al., (1966:215), "tests are an attempt to construct an instrument for measuring attainment, or progress, or ability in language skills."

Thus, testing is a set of techniques of questioning and observing to find out how far learning is taking place, whether the students are following the teacher or instructor, and what are the problems of the students? It is also used to assess the knowledge of the students in order to compare one individual to another individual in the same group.

The term *evaluation* in modern educational practice is used for "tests" and "examination". It is a general term that covers both. It is a much more comprehensive term than either test or examination. The term *test* refers to the measurement of the competence of the learners with reference to the particular area of knowledge, whereas the term *examination* refers to particular standard that is to be achieved by the learner after a particular level.

A test is regarded as an attempt to see whether the things taught have been learned, while examination is regarded as an attempt to find out whether the students have attained certain predetermined standard. Thus, a test is directly concerned with teaching while an examination is linked with an externally fixed standard of achievement. However, since both tests and examinations have the same common function, namely evaluation, it has become conventional to call them 'tests'.

Principles of Testing

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
12 : 1 January 2012
Md. Motiur Rahman, Ph.D. and Arvind Kumar Gautam, M.A., NET   435
Testing and Evaluation: A Significant Characteristic of Language Learning and Teaching

❖ Anything which can be defined can be tested.

❖ Anything which cannot be defined cannot be tested.

❖ What is being taught only that is to be tested.

❖ You cannot test what you have not taught.

❖ Testing should provide information that is credible and very useful.

❖ Testing should be impartial and independent in its function.

❖ It should always be against some identified standards.

In the area of testing and evaluation, evaluation refers to the judgment of performance as process or product of change. In other words, it is the process of testing, appraising and judging achievement, growth, product, process or changes in these, through the use of formal and informal tests and techniques. The process of evaluation is global in conception and application. There are three major components that constitute the concept of evaluation and testing, i.e. **C**ontent, **M**ethod and **P**urpose.

Content: Content has different connotation in testing. The general assumption is that whatever has been taught is to be tested. Hence, whatever is assumed as content for teaching will become the content for testing too? In Second Language teaching, structure gets focused as main content. In First Language teaching, meaning gets the main focus and in the area of education, the traits of personality.

Method: A means or manner of procedure, especially a regular and systematic way of accomplishing something. In other words, it refers to the plans or procedures followed to accomplish a task or attain a goal. In testing, it refers to the procedure to be followed according to a definite, established, logical or systematic plan.

Purpose: In the field of testing it is defined as the reason for which something exists/happens. It is synonymously used to represent the terms goal, aim and objective. Goal refers to a very broad and ultimate category, aim to a more specific set of purposes, and objective as the most precisely defined ends which can be described in terms of behavioral outcomes in the field of education.

Discussion

1. **Tests designed for various purposes:**

Tests are designed for different purposes, which help in making decisions about possible course of action. Keeping in view the purpose, tests may be characterized as follows:

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
12 : 1 January 2012
Md. Motiur Rahman, Ph.D. and Arvind Kumar Gautam, M.A., NET   436
Testing and Evaluation: A Significant Characteristic of Language Learning and Teaching

(a) Proficiency tests:

It is designed to find out how much of a language a person actually knows. As Davies (1977:46) suggests, "proficiency tests, as we see it, are concerned with assessing what has been learned of a known or an unknown syllabus". This test may be used generally before language teaching programme in order to prepare the teaching materials for the learning programme. On the basis of the information collected through this test, language teachers prepare their teaching materials. This test is very helpful in order to organize teaching materials according to the current need.

(b) Achievement tests:

This test is constructed to find out that how much of a course a learner has actually mastered. Paterno (1965: 376) is of the view that "An achievement test is an inquiry to see if what has been taught is retained". It determines that how much of the material of a course has actually been mastered by the learner. This includes only what has been taught to him. These tests are generally given at the end of the teaching programme.

(c) Prognostic tests:

This test is designed to predict the knowledge of a person, that, up to which level he is able to learn. This test is very useful for selecting the students in any language learning programme and the material of teaching, which is sufficient to the learner in any teaching programme.

(d) Diagnostic tests:

Diagnostic test differs from other tests on the basis of the use of the information obtained and to the absence of a skill in the learner. The purpose of this test is to find out what remains to be taught during the course of learning. As Davies (1977:47) points out that, "a diagnostic test may be constructed for itself or it may be an additional use made of an achievement or proficiency test. If it is specially constructed it could perhaps be argued that some element of learner's skills, or rather absence of skill, is involved because the tester is concerned with discovering what might be termed non-achievement". Through this test a teacher can know where the learner needs more attention and which area of language skills has to be practiced more. This test also points out the shortcomings of the learner and of teaching materials. And if teacher will know shortcomings of the learner and of teaching materials, he could adopt certain remedial methods in order to remove the learning difficulties.

2. Preparation of tests:

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
12 : 1 January 2012
Md. Motiur Rahman, Ph.D. and Arvind Kumar Gautam, M.A., NET   437
Testing and Evaluation: A Significant Characteristic of Language Learning and Teaching

Objective tests are designed to elicit specific responses. It can be quickly judged as correct or incorrect. Objective tests can be of two types: discrete items and passage items. Tests can be constructed successfully only after the objectives of the course are finalized. An instructor has to determine the objectives of the test as well as prepare a general plan in advance. In modern language teaching programmes, an equal emphasis is given to all the basic language skills i.e. Comprehension, Speaking, Reading and Writing, from the beginning of the course, and language tests are to be prepared accordingly. In language testing, time is an important factor. Both the duration of a test and its proper administration at regular intervals are essential factors to be kept in mind.

There are three main stages of preparation of a test.

(i) *Planning:* It covers outlining test, listing of topics, casting of ideas for items and material collection.

(ii) *Composition:* This includes the composition of actual items and choice for objectivity.

(iii) *Analysis:* It consists of determining difficulties and discrimination of test items. Speediness of test and scope for its improvement.

3. Characteristics of tests:

As Bachman (1992: 119) suggests, a language test can be classified in terms of five characteristics, which are as follows:

(i) Test can be distinguished according to their intended use, such as selection, entrance, readiness, placement, diagnosis, progress, attainment and mastery.

(ii) Tests can differ in content; Achievement tests are based on syllabus, while a proficiency test derives a theory of language ability.

(iii) Different frames of reference can provide the basis for test development and score interpretation norm referenced tests are developed to maximize differences among individual test takers and a test score is interpreted in relation to the score of the test takers.

(iv) Tests can be classified according to the scoring procedure (the act or process of evaluating responses to test situations or evaluating characteristics of whomever or whatever is being rated. It consists of checking the student's response to each item to see if it is correct. Scoring objective tests is purely mechanical process which requires no special skills); objective tests require no judgment on the part of the scorer but in subjective tests, the scorer must judge the correctness of the test taker's response.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
12 : 1 January 2012
Md. Motiur Rahman, Ph.D. and Arvind Kumar Gautam, M.A., NET   438
Testing and Evaluation: A Significant Characteristic of Language Learning and Teaching

(v) Tests may employ different testing methods, such as dictation, cloze, multiple choice, completion, composition and interview.

Those above characteristics are neither mutually exclusive nor independent of one another. A participator test may be useful for more than one purpose, such as entrance and placement, and either an achievement or a proficiency test might be used for placement depending on the specific situation.

4. Requirements of a test:

A test has been characterized by certain features, which can be termed as "requirements of a test". Ingram (1974:313) has discussed these requirements of a test. A good test must meet at least six requirements, which are as follows:

(i) *Discrimination:* It is one of the most important requirements, which is necessary for a test. It means that a test must be designed in such a way that it can discriminate among the students. If we want to measure the height of the school children, we should use such a measuring device, which is suitable for the students whom we are going to measure.

(ii) *Reliability:* Reliability refers to the accuracy of a measuring instrument that is if a student is tested again and again the result or score must always be the same, regardless of who is giving and marking it. As Paterno (1965:379) suggests that, "A test that lacks reliability is as useless as a thermometer that gave different reading when the temperature of the air was the same. A test is reliable if it will always give the same results under the same conditions". A test must have consistency in it. As Davies (1977:57) is of the view that, " A reliable test possesses consistency of results. An inconsistent test would give meaning less, random results. Before looking at the meaning of results, it is important to ensure that they are reliable".

(iii) *Validity:* It means that the test should measure the same for which it has been devised. If it does, it is a valid test. If a test of pronunciation tests only pronunciation and nothing else, it is a valid test of pronunciation. Paterno (1965:378) suggests that, "Validity can only be obtained when we state clearly the objectives of our teaching, break them down into skills and abilities involved, and define them in separable elements; and then to measure each in situations which comes as close as possible to the real circumstances in which they will be used". For instance if listening comprehension in English is aimed at, it must be tested in a variety of ways that approach the actual, normal use of language. Ingram (1974:315) is of the view that, "the most obvious way of achieving validity is to arrange for a job sample. If you want to know how good a person is at writing essays, you ask him to write an essay, if you want to know how fluent he is in a foreign language, you ask him to

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
12 : 1 January 2012
Md. Motiur Rahman, Ph.D. and Arvind Kumar Gautam, M.A., NET   439
Testing and Evaluation: A Significant Characteristic of Language Learning and Teaching

talk to you. The trouble is that, validity is limited by reliability; no test or examination can be anymore valid than it is reliable. So if it turns out that the reliability of marking essays or of rating command of spoken language is low, then validity of the marks or ratings must be correspondingly low". If the reliability of a test ensures its consistency, validity ensures its meaningfulness. A test is meaningful, within the terms of what is wanted from the test.

(iv) *Scorability:* It refers, that the test should be scored with ease so that the user may be able to handle it. Subjective tests are not easy to score as compared to objective tests. Secondly there should not be any differences in scoring. The difference will affect the accuracy of the test.

(v) *Economy:* This is practical criterion the test should measure what it wants to test and it should also measure in a reasonable time. If it does, the test is practical and economical.

(vi) *Administerability:* It means that a test should be such that it may be given under the conditions that prevail and the personnel (person who is conducting the test) that are available. For instance, if a test requires electronic equipments and the service of highly trained technician, then it is not administrable since these facilities are not available in most of the school and even most colleges and Universities.

Summary & Conclusion

Thus, testing and evaluation are very useful in the preparation of language teaching materials as well as after the actual teaching has taken place. These tests are used to place the students into categories as well as to judge the problems of teaching. On the basis of these tests, language teacher focuses his or her attention towards the areas of difficulties which the learner faces in any language teaching programme and these areas of difficulties can be predicted by the effective use of language tests. So, without effective testing no language teaching programme can be successful.

We must mention here another important matter: a comprehensive language testing covers all the levels of Linguistics such as phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, grammar and semantics and without the knowledge and application of Linguistics these areas cannot be tested properly. A linguistic approach to language testing, therefore, is an approach, which makes use of the theoretical knowledge of Linguistics. For instance, for testing the listening and speaking skills, the knowledge of the phonological system of the target language is essential. Only then appropriate tests can be constructed and the required skill can be tested properly.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com
12 : 1 January 2012
Md. Motiur Rahman, Ph.D. and Arvind Kumar Gautam, M.A., NET   440
Testing and Evaluation: A Significant Characteristic of Language Learning and Teaching

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com
12 : 1 January 2012
Md. Motiur Rahman, Ph.D. and Arvind Kumar Gautam, M.A., NET   441
Testing and Evaluation: A Significant Characteristic of Language Learning and Teaching

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com
12 : 1 January 2012
Md. Motiur Rahman, Ph.D. and Arvind Kumar Gautam, M.A., NET   442
Testing and Evaluation: A Significant Characteristic of Language Learning and Teaching