

Foreign language testing
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Abstract

The creation of a wide range of methodologies and tools for research and development, as well as the range of philosophical viewpoints and the types of research issues being examined, have all occurred over the past twenty years in the field of language testing. While this research has expanded our knowledge of the origins and varieties of language tests, as well as the implications and ethical considerations surrounding test use, it has also highlighted information gaps and suggested new research directions.

This study examines changes in language testing theory and practice over the last few years and makes some recommendations for the field's professionalization and validation research. It is suggested that professionalization and validation research are linked since ethical issues must be based on the use of valid tests.

The aim of this study is to cover certain gaps in the previous studies like: what is really meant by foreign language testing? What are the main types of foreign language testing? According to what criteria foreign language testing is done? These are the main problems that this research is carried to treat.

Concerning the aims of this paper, it is done to find out: the real and suitable definition of foreign language testing, and the main types and criteria of foreign language testing.

Key terms:

Foreign, language, types, tests, value.

Introduction

Testing people's abilities to understand or communicate in a given language falls under the broad area of language testing. There are several uses for language testing. Language testing can be used in academic settings to evaluate a student's present proficiency or growth for the purpose of academic placement. Language testing can be used in professional contexts to ascertain whether an applicant possesses the language abilities required for a position. Language tests are a reliable way to gauge a person's language skills in any situation (ROY, 1988 : 45).

A subfield of applied linguistics is language assessment, sometimes known as language testing. Its primary areas of interest are the evaluation of first, second, or other languages in the contexts of schools, colleges, and universities; the evaluation of language use in the workplace; and the evaluation of language in the situations of immigration, citizenship, and asylum. The evaluation may cover speaking, writing, listening, integrating two or more of these skills, or additional language ability

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elements. Knowledge (theoretical grasp of how the language functions) and competency (the ability to use the language effectively) may be given equal weight, or a larger emphasis may be placed on one or the other (ibid).

The history of language testing

The history of language testing may have begun with the evaluation of ESL students at Cambridge and Oxford in England in the late nineteenth century, but the first works in language assessment in the United States date back to the groundbreaking studies and test developed by Robert Lado and David Harris in the 1950s. The English Language Institute at the University of Michigan, which is now known as CaMLA, created the Michigan Tests, and Educational Testing Service (ETS), Princeton, New Jersey, created the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which were the first large-scale tests in the United States (SCIARONE, 2011: 56).

Robert Lado, Director of Testing at ELI, and Charles Fries, Director of ELI, were adamant about putting foreign language education and testing on a "scientific" basis. The Lado Test of Aural Comprehension was the first exam introduced in 1946. About ten years later, a comprehensive battery of exams called "an English language test battery" was put together and given to new international students at Michigan and other universities. The Michigan English Language Assessment Battery now uses this term (MELAB). Under contract with the United States Information Agency, the ELI also created the ECPE (Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English) exam in 1953 for use abroad (ibid).

Launched in 1961, the TOEFL was created to evaluate applicants' proficiency in the English language. It is accepted by colleges and institutions in the United States and Canada. Despite only being offered in an online version (now known as the TOEFL iBT), this test is still in use and is taken by many people throughout the world (ibid).

The International Test of English Proficiency (iTEP), the Canadian English Language Proficiency Index Program (CELPIP) Test, the Pearson Test of English (PTE), the CaMLA assessments, which include the Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB), and the Cambridge English Language Assessment, are just a few of the tests that compete for this market, the British Council and the Australian IDP's International English Language Testing System (IELTS) (ibid).

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Many public and private agencies use language exams that were established in the United States by non-profit and other organizations including the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C., and Language Testing International in White Plains, New York. To evaluate the skills of its students and teaching assistants, many universities, including the University of California, Los Angeles, Teachers College, Columbia University, and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, have created English (and other) language examinations. These language tests are frequently referred to as proficiency or achievement tests (scott, 2003: 78).

The General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) in Taiwan, the College English Test in China, and the STEP Eiken in Japan are a few other contemporary English language assessments that have been produced. New technology has also entered the field: the ETS is currently experimenting with automated scoring of its writing tests, while Versant's English and Dutch assessments use phone technology to record speech and score its speaking examinations automatically (ibid).

Forms of Language Testing

Language evaluations come in five primary categories: aptitude, diagnostic, placement, accomplishment, and proficiency tests (Shameem,2007: 56).

1. Ability tests

A person's aptitude is their capacity to learn new things. Language aptitude exams measure a person's capacity to pick up new words and phrases. Due to the nature of the examinations, they are less language-specific and more generic than the majority of other language tests. Instead, they evaluate a person's capacity to swiftly pick up new language skills (ibid).

The most qualified workers may be chosen by an employer through an aptitude test to enroll in language training so they can assist in the establishment of a new overseas branch or provide multilingual customer support (ibid).

2. Diagnostic Tests

Diagnostic tests are used to determine the current state of a person's skills in a certain domain, in this case, language skills. Diagnostic tests, as opposed to achievement and

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proficiency exams, are often administered at the beginning of a language learning course or program (ibid).

On a diagnostic test, the majority of test-takers come across questions or assignments that are beyond the boundaries of their knowledge and expertise. The test's outcomes highlight a person's language proficiency's strong points and flaws. Teachers can create lesson plans that fill in the gaps in a student's present abilities with the aid of a student's diagnostic test findings. Additionally, students can take diagnostic exams to ascertain what they need to focus on in order to achieve a greater level of performance.

3. Placement Tests

Diagnostic tests and placement tests have some commonalities. They are given out in advance of the start of a course or program of study and are used for instructional purposes. The application is a little different in this instance. Placement tests are used by educators and administrators to divide language learners into classes or study groups based on their skill levels (shohamy, 2012: 67).

To assess whether a new French major should start with more advanced subjects and skip other courses, a university may administer a placement test. Since international students frequently arrive with varying English-learning histories and competence levels, placement tests are also a crucial form of test in English language instruction at the university level (ibid).

4. Achievement Tests

A student's language proficiency is assessed on an accomplishment test to determine how far their learning has come. Achievement tests, as opposed to diagnostic, aptitude, and placement exams, solely include material that students should have encountered during their previous academic coursework (ibid).

Achievement examinations are often given at the end of the course or after a class has finished a particular chapter or unit. At the end of the semester, a language instructor could administer a final exam to gauge how well a student has retained the material they have learned. Achievement exams are frequently evaluated and intended to demonstrate how well the subject is progressing in their studies of the target language (ibid).

5. Proficiency Tests

The term "proficiency" describes someone's ability to use a specific talent. Tests of language proficiency measure a person's functional language abilities. Achievement tests and proficiency exams are comparable in several ways, but proficiency tests concentrate on the practical application of information rather than on knowledge itself. Tests of language proficiency compare a user's output and understanding to a rating scale, such as the ACTFL, ILR, and CEFR scales (short, 2003: 64).

Proficiency exams are helpful in a number of settings, unlike the majority of the tests we've looked at, which are primarily related to academic contexts. No matter how they learned the language or how proficient they think they are, everyone can take a test of language ability. Testing candidates' language proficiency in authentic situations yields reliable results (ibid).

Types of Language Skills

Language skills can be used as a lens through which to view language testing. Even while you might ask someone if they "know" a particular language, that general term actually refers to a number of other abilities. Language proficiency is based on four skills: speaking, reading, and writing (ibid).

These abilities can be grouped according to how and where they communicate. Speaking and writing both involve the output of language, but listening and reading both involve the input of language. These pairs are different from one another in terms of communication orientation. However, the elements in each pair vary in terms of how they communicate. While reading and writing include written communication, speaking and listening both involve oral communication (ibid).

Let's take a closer look at each of the four language skills.

1. Listening

Understanding oral communication is a necessary component of listening abilities in a given language. The first step toward comprehension and listening skills when a person learns their first language as a baby is listening to their parents and other people speaking around them. Additionally, some people learn a second language through immersion, with listening abilities emerging first (shehan, 2008: 90).

2. Speaking

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People frequently use the generic term "speaking a language" to refer to a variety of ways to use a language. For instance, somebody can claim to be able to converse in a language utilizing all four of the communication abilities rather than simply saying they speak it. But to negotiate meaning in a discussion, speaking is a specific ability that is necessary in addition to listening. Speaking is one of the four abilities that may be most difficult to master but is also the most valuable because it needs real-time communication (ibid).

3. Reading

Oral and written language comprehension are two completely different abilities. Understanding the meaning of written language is a requirement for reading proficiency. Some people may find it simpler to read than talk because they can take in and digest the language at their own pace, while others may be able to speak a language with a high level of fluency yet be entirely unable to read it (ibid).

How similar or different the writing system is from one's original language affects how difficult it is to learn to read in a second language. For instance, the Latin alphabet, which is the most commonly used alphabetic writing system in the world, is used by the majority of European languages, making letters on the page look identical.

However, a knowledge of the Latin alphabet won't help you understand Arabic script or Chinese characters. Reading tests can help you determine your proficiency in reading a language (ibid).

4. Writing

Since different languages have different writing systems, writing presents the same difficulties as reading. It can be particularly difficult to learn to write in a second language that employs a writing system that is entirely different from the one you are accustomed to. Even when learning our first language, writing doesn't come as naturally as talking, thus it can be a difficult skill for language learners to master. Because of this, many students take writing classes throughout their academic careers in their mother tongue (Shehan, 2009: 67).

Language Proficiency Tests

- The purpose of the language proficiency exams offered by ACTFL is to evaluate a person's proficiency in the four previously mentioned skills. The following are a few of the most reputable exams for evaluating the aforementioned abilities (ibid):
 - Test of Listening Proficiency: The Listening Proficiency Test (LPT), an online assessment, gauges a person's capacity for understanding spoken language in one of 11 available languages. The test-taker must respond to multiple-choice questions on

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what they hear after listening to recordings. The outcomes reveal the test-level taker's of listening competence (ibid).

- Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI): This test assesses a person's ability to communicate in a certain language. An ACTFL-Certified Tester calls the test taker and evaluates their level of proficiency in relation to the standards listed in one of the proficiency scales. The interview is a helpful assessment technique since it mimics a real-life dialogue while adhering to a structure and process (ibid).
- Oral Proficiency Interview-computer (OPIc): This tool assesses a person's ability to speak in a given language. The OPIc has the same objective as the OPI: to gather a sample of speech that may be evaluated and compared to the standards listed on a competency scale.
- The internet-delivered assessment emulates the "live" OPI, but delivery of questions is through a carefully designed program and via a virtual avatar, allowing the test to be taken on demand and at a time convenient to the candidate and proctor (ibid).
- Reading Proficiency Test: During this internet-based test, candidates read passages in one of 12 languages and respond to multiple-choice questions to show their proficiency in that language's reading comprehension. The test is machine scored because of the way it is set up, and the results are made available right away.
- Writing Proficiency Test: Another online test is the Writing Proficiency Test (WPT). Instead of selecting one answer from a list of options, test-takers elaborate on open-ended writing prompts. The written replies of the candidate are evaluated by ACTFL-Certified raters in relation to the standards set forth by one of the proficiency scales. This exam is offered in a number of languages (Spolsky, 2000: 53).

Ethics in language testing

Despite the claims made by Alderson (1997) and others that testers have long been interested in issues of fairness (as seen by their continuing interest in

Others have distinguished the ethical question from validity as a crucial facet of the professionalization of language testing as a field, and that striving for fairness is a component of ethical behavior (Davies, 1997).

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Messick (1994: 64) asserts that because all testing entails making value judgments, it is possible to have a critical conversation about language testing. whose ideals are being upheld and serviced; this then prompts thought about moral behavior.

Messick (1994, 1996) has expanded the definition of validity to take into account what he calls consequential validity, or the effects of how test results are used and interpreted. According to Hamp-Lyons (1997), the concept of washback should be expanded to include "impact," which is the impact of exams on society as a whole as opposed to just people or the educational system. She is voicing a growing worry about the political and moral concerns around test use, which have developed in recent years.

Both McNamara (1998) and Hamp-Lyons (1998) review the growing body of work on ethics and emphasize the importance of creating standards for language testing. Both offer feedback on a proposed Code of Conduct that is supported by the International Language Testing

According to Davies (1997: 53), as tests frequently have a prescriptive or normative role, their social ramifications could be extensive. He makes the case for language testers to uphold a code of ethics in order to safeguard both the profession's members and persons from the exploitation and abuse of tests. He does, however, counter that the morality argument should not be taken too far should it result in cynical manipulation of norms of practice or professional paralysis.

The Value of Language Testing

Language testing is a useful tool for both professional and academic settings. Language tests can indicate a student's current level of understanding and show them the way to better proficiency. To ascertain whether their skill set satisfies the requirements of a job or whether they require additional training, professionals might use language testing. Employers can also certify the language skills of current workers and new hires to make sure they can properly accomplish the responsibilities assigned to them without endangering the firm (ibid).

Because language is complex, evaluating it can be challenging. Fortunately, professionals have developed tests that accurately evaluate a person's language abilities. All you need to do to obtain a helpful assessment of language ability is to use these exams as an educator, employer, student, or professional (ibid).

Conclusions

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The study concludes that foreign language testing is an important task and it needs to be done according to certain criteria. The first criteria has to do with memory. Its purpose is to assess pupils' word and grammatical construction knowledge. Lexical and grammatical units must be recognized, remembered, and reproduced by test-takers. which were covered in the educational programs.

The second criterion evaluates how well the pupils understood lexical units. Their comprehension of word meanings is tested by test exercises. Students must be able to translate words, identify word and expression synonyms and antonyms, and more. The third requirement focuses on the practical use of lexical and grammatical units. Students are provided instructions on how to spot and fix various errors in a specific situation. The fourth need examines how lexical and grammatical elements are used in a context. Language testing has different types and forms and to choose one depends on the speaker's background. Ethics and social norms affects the process of language testing

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