

LANGUAGE TESTING: WHAT LANGUAGE TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW

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Abstrak:

Salah satu bagian penyelenggaraan pengajaran, termasuk pengajaran bahasa, adalah penyelenggaraan tes yang bertujuan untuk memperoleh informasi tentang peningkatan kemampuan siswa sebagai hasil pengajaran. Tetapi banyak tes bahasa yang diberikan oleh guru tidak mengikuti kaidah yang benar. Artikel ini menyajikan tujuan, bentuk dan karakteristik tes bahasa yang baik.

Kata kunci:

Language Testing, Language Teacher

Introduction

Teaching process, including language teaching, is not only limited on teaching learning activity between teacher and student in classroom but it also needs an evaluation to measure student's achievement. From the result of evaluation it can be seen whether the teaching learning activity is successful or not. Since education is not always successful, any effort must be directed to reach the attainment of educational objectives that have been determined. All of those concern with the process of education needed in order to know the result periodically of the teaching and learning that have been done so far. Then the teacher can decide which one to be maintained and which one should be changed to improve the teaching learning activity.

According to Sudijono, one of learning outcomes of the evaluation devices is testing.¹ Testing is commonly used to measure the outcomes of instructional program.² It is an important part of every teaching and learning process. The interrelationship between teaching and testing is a fact that cannot be ignored. Both teaching and testing are so closely interrelated that it is virtually impossible to work in a field without being constantly concerned with the other.³

Many reactions appear when the students fail in their test. The teacher will probably accuse the students of being

¹ Anas Sudijono, *Pengantar Evaluasi Pendidikan*, (Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada, 2005), hlm.65.

² Norman E. Gronlund, *Constructing Achievement Tests*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1982), hlm.1.

³ J. B. Heaton, *Writing English Language Tests*, (London: Longman, 1988), hlm.5.

lazy, inattentive, and incapable, etc. It is not fair if students are always blamed when the test result are bad. The good student's achievement may look bad on the test result. On the other hand the bad one may look good on the test results. Actually there are many other factors involved. One of them is the quality of the test itself. The test results are much influenced by the quality of the test administered.

The teacher has supplied with the necessary skills to develop his profession, including how to evaluate his teaching learning activity by planning, administering, and scoring his own tests. In fact, we often find that there are still many tests given to the students which are actually do not follow the right principles. In other words, the test constructed by the teacher cannot be always categorized as good tests. Therefore, language teachers need to know the fundamental considerations before constructing a test.

This paper discusses the purpose, types, and characteristics of a good language test. It also figures out testing the language skills and areas.

The Purposes of Language Test

Finocchiaro and Bonomo explain that at least there are five reasons why test is administered in the teaching learning activity.

1. To grade students, so that the teacher can move them forward to the next higher class or retain them at their present level.

2. Through appropriate instruments, teacher can set realistic standards of achievement for groups or individuals. By comparing a test result with another similar class, the teacher can judge whether the test is too easy or difficult, or whether the curriculum needs revising or not.
3. Test can also help someone assess the effects of experiment. For example, through a carefully controlled experiment, one may wish to do whether the students' native language in the classroom increases their program or not.
4. The confidence of the community or nation in a language program may sometimes be based on the results of a testing program.
5. The three principle reasons for testing, as far as classroom teachers concerned are: (a) to diagnose the specific feature of language in which individual student or groups are having difficulties, (b) to help teachers measure their ability as teachers, (c) to find out how much students have learned or achieved.⁴

While the purposes of language test, according to Hughes are:

1. To measure language proficiency.
2. To discover how successful students have been in achieving the objectives of a course of study.

⁴Finocchiaro and Bonomo, *The Foreign Language Learning: A Guided for Teacher*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1973), hlm. 206.

3. To diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses, to identify what they know and what they don't know.
4. To assist placement of students by identifying the stage or part of a teaching program most appropriate to their ability.⁵

Gronlund states that the use of tests can aid learning by:

- (1) improving student motivation,
- (2) increasing retention and transfer of learning,
- (3) increasing student self-understanding,
- (4) providing feedback concerning instructional effectiveness.⁶

Moreover, test can contribute the teaching learning process, the improvement of instruction, and the information gained from the result of the test can be used to assess and improve instruction, for example, in judging:

- The appropriateness and attainability of the instructional objectives,
- The usefulness of the instructional materials,
- The effectiveness of the instructional methods

In addition, the results obtained from the tests can also be used to provide valuable information concerning the performance of the test items themselves. In general, it can be said that to measure the outcome of

instructional program and to know how the objectives of teaching learning activity have been reached, it can be seen by administering a test. Furthermore, it is true that testing cannot be separated from teaching learning activity.

Types of Language Tests

There are various types of test based on their functions. Heaton distinguishes the types of test into five commonly used types.

1. Progress test

It is to assess the progress which students have in mastering the material taught in the classroom. This test is often given to motivate the students and also to enable the teachers to assess the degree of success of their teaching.

2. Achievement test

It is designed to measure mastery of particular syllabus. This test is similar to class progress test that are generally based on a syllabus and measures what has been taught and learnt. However, the achievement test is designed primarily to measure individual performance rather than to act as a means of motivating student or reinforce learning.

3. Proficiency test

It is a test which measures a student's achievement in relation to a specific tasks which he will later be required to perform. Since proficiency test is concerned with future performance rather than past

⁵Arthur Hughes, *Testing for Language Teachers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), hlm.8.

⁶ Norman E. Gronlund, *Constructing Achievement Tests*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jerseys: Prentice-Hall, 1982), hlm.6.

achievement, it rarely takes into account of any syllabus which the students have followed.

4. Aptitude test

It measures the student's probable performance in learning a foreign language, showing whether the student has any special aptitude for learning a new language or not.

5. Diagnostic test

It is primarily designed to assess the student's knowledge and skills in particular areas before a course or study is begun.⁷

While according to Harris, there are only three general types of language tests.

1. Aptitude test serves to indicate an individual's facility for acquiring specific skills and learning.
2. Proficiency test indicates what an individual is capable of doing now (as the results of his cumulative learning experiences).
3. Achievement test indicates the extent to which an individual has mastered the specific skills of information acquired in a formal learning situation.⁸

Testing should be considered during the planning of instruction, and it should play a significant role in the various stages of instruction. There are numerous decisions that teachers must

make from the beginning of instruction to the end.

Gronlund states that there are three types of decisions teachers need to make: (1) decisions at the beginning of instruction (*placement test*), (2) decision during the instruction (*formative and diagnostic tests*), and (3) decisions at the end of instruction (*summative test*).⁹

An achievement test that is commonly used by language teachers for making decision of instructional objectives is as follows:

1. Placement test measures the students' achievement at the beginning of instructional objectives.
2. Formative and diagnostic tests measure the students' achievement during the instructional objectives.
3. Summative test measures the students' achievement at the end of instructional objectives.

Students' achievement can be measured by either a teacher made-test or a standardized test. The teacher made-test is generally prepared, administered and scored by one classroom teacher. While the standardized test is prepared by more than one person as professional testing services to assist institutions in the selection, placement and evaluation of students.

The teacher made test is used by the teacher to measure the achievement

⁷J. B. Heaton, *Writing English Language Tests*, (London: Longman, 1988), hlm.171.

⁸David P. Harris, *Testing English as a Second Language*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969), hlm. 6.

⁹ Norman E. Gronlund, *Constructing Achievement Tests*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1982), hlm.2.

of his own students after finishing the instruction in the teaching learning process. These tests are never tried out to a sample of students before the real test is administered to their students. Moreover, the teachers never or hardly evaluate and revise the test items although they will be used again in other times.

Gronlund suggests that the first consideration in test planning is to determine the type of test to be prepared, because if the test planning is carefully done, constructing relevant test items is greatly simplified.¹⁰ In addition, in constructing an achievement test to fit a set of specifications, it is important to define the variety of item types.¹¹ The tests constructed by teachers are usually divided into two general types, the objectives test, and subjective test. Objective test items include the following selection-types items: multiple-choice, true false, and matching. They also include the supply-type items that are limited to short answer and completion. The other supply-type item is subjective. The notable characteristic of subjective test is the students are asked the question that requires them to produce their own answer.¹²

¹⁰Ibid, hlm.6.

¹¹Ibid, hlm. 36

¹²Ibid, hlm. 71.

Characteristics of Good Tests

All good tests, possess three qualities: validity, reliability, and practicality¹³.

1. Validity

Validity of a test is the extent to which it measures what it is supposed to measure and nothing else.¹⁴ Every test, whether it is informal classroom test or a public examination should be as valid as the constructor can make it. The test must aim to provide a true measure of the particular skill which is intended to measure. A test is said to be valid if it measures accurately what it is intended to measure.¹⁵ Then Tinambunan divides validity into three types of validity: content validity, criterion-related validity, and construct validity.¹⁶ The three types of validity that have been identified and commonly used in educational and psychological measurement are content validity, criterion-related validities (predictive and concurrent), and construct validity.¹⁷

¹³David P. Harris, *Testing English as a Second Language*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969), hlm. 47.

¹⁴J. B. Heaton, *Writing English Language Tests*, (London: Longman, 1988), hlm.159.

¹⁵Arthur Hughes, *Testing for Language Teachers*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), hlm. 22.

¹⁶Wilmar Tinambunan, *Evaluation of Student Achievement*, (Jakarta: P2LPTK Dirjen Dikti Depdikbud, 1988), hlm. 11.

¹⁷Norman E. Gronlund, *Constructing Achievement Tests*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1982), hlm.126.

2. Reliability

The second characteristic of a good test is reliability. Reliability refers to the consistency of the test score. A test should be reliable because an unreliable test does not measure anything.¹⁸ In addition, reliability also means the consistency with a test measures the same things all the time.¹⁹ Teachers need to know about reliability so that they can use test score to make appropriate decisions about their students.

The level of consistency of a set of scores can be estimated by using the method of internal analysis to compute a reliability coefficient.²⁰ Test reliability techniques get two scores on people in a group by: (a) the test-retest method, in which we administer the test twice to the same students; (b) by using two comparable forms of a test, and; (c) by using named split-half method.²¹

Consequently, it is important for teachers to determine the consistency of the scores from their test are, so that those scores can be used to make instructional decisions about students wisely.

3. Practicality

The third characteristic of a good test is practicality. Employability for practicality includes a variety of practical, common sense considerations for making it easy to apply the test and interpret the result.²²

Furthermore, there are some factors about the administration and the test itself that must be carefully considered:

- a. The availability of enough time for the administration of the test should be fair because the reliability of a test is directly related to the test's length. If the time allocated to do testing is very short, the result of the test tends to be unreliable. A safe procedure is to allot as much time as is necessary to obtain valid and reliable results.
- b. The test should be as economical as possible in cost.
- c. Any equipment needed during the administration of the test, for example, language laboratory, tape recorder, must be prepared in advance.
- d. The length of time needed to get the marking done on the test result.
- e. The scoring procedure must be appropriate. This is very crucial because it will contribute to the case of interpretation of the raw score that can be easily

¹⁸ Robert Lado, *Language Testing*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), hlm. 330.

¹⁹ Wilmar Tinambunan, *Evaluation of Student Achievement*, (Jakarta: P2LPTK Dirjen Dikti Depdikbud, 1988), hlm. 14.

²⁰ David A. Frisbie, *Reliability of Scores from Teacher Made Test*, (Iowa: The University of Iowa Spring Inc, 1988) hlm. 2

²¹ Clinton Chase, *Measurement for Educational Evaluation*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1978), hlm. 80

²²Ibid, hlm. 92

converted into meaningful scores.²³

Testing the language skills

The four major skills in language are listening, speaking reading and writing. According to Heaton, the ways of assessing performance in the four major skills may take the form of tests of:

- Listening (auditory) comprehension, in which short utterances, dialogues, talks and lectures are given to the testees.
- Speaking ability, usually in the form of an interview, a picture description, role play, and a problem-solving task involving pair work or group work.
- Reading comprehension, in which questions are set to test the students' ability to understand the gist of a text and to extract key information on specific points in the text. And
- Writing ability, usually in the form of letters, reports, memos, messages, instructions, and accounts of past events, etc.²⁴

Testing Language Areas

In an attempt to isolate the language areas learnt, a considerable number of tests include sections on:

1. Tests of grammar and usage

These tests measure students' ability to recognize appropriate grammatical forms and to manipulate structures.

2. Tests of vocabulary (concerned with word meanings, word formation and collocations)

A test of vocabulary measures student's knowledge of the meaning of certain words as well as the pattern and collocation in which they occur. Such a test may test their active vocabulary (the words they should be able to use in speaking and in writing) or they passive vocabulary (the words they should be able to recognize and understand when they are listening to someone or when they are reading).

3. Test of phonology

Test items designed to test phonology might attempt to assess the following sub-skills: ability to recognize and pronounce the significant sound contrasts of a language, ability to recognize and use the stress patterns of a language, and ability to hear and produce melody or pattern of the tunes of a language (i.e. the rise and fall of the voice)

CONCLUSION

Well-made test of language can help students in at least two ways. First of all, such test can help to create positive attitudes toward class by giving students a sense of accomplishment and a feeling that the teacher's evaluation matches with that he has been taught.

²³ Wilmar Tinambunan, *Evaluation of Student Achievement*, (Jakarta: P2LPTK Dirjen Dikti Depdikbud, 1988), hlm. 23.

²⁴ J. B. Heaton, *Writing English Language Tests*, (London: Longman, 1988), hlm.12.

And the second way is that language test can be benefit for the students by helping them master the language. In addition, good language test also help students to learn the language by requiring them to study hard, emphasize the course objectives, and show them what they need to improve.

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