

## TENDENCIES AND INNOVATIONS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS ASSESSMENT: COMMUNICATIVE AND PRAGMATIC APPROACHES

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### ANNOTATION

The article discusses the main trends in methodological approaches to English language proficiency and language achievement assessment and elaborates testing and assessment techniques to align reliable and fair assessment techniques with English language learning based on international CEFR standard of evaluating language competencies and national standards of educational and training curriculum. The study aims to reflect the advancements and shortcomings in structural and communicative approaches to English language assessment backed up with research findings from foreign and contemporary scholars' literature review. As a result, researched comprehensive models of language assessment tasks in terms of objective and subjective tests and analysis of documents in the implementation of language proficiency assessment into continuous education, especially higher specialized education, help extend the scope of innovative studies in the field of communicative English language teaching and testing.

**KEY WORDS:** assessment, approach, technique, objective, subjective, test, model, education, learning, instruction, communicative, pragmatics, reliability, validity, level, proficiency, ability, criterion-referenced, task, summative, formative, authentic, function, practice, category, EFL, ESL, practicality

### INTRODUCTION

Testing language proficiency is regarded as the key and inseparable component of EFL and ESL teaching and learning in the time of global spread of innovative technologies along with the frequent need-based use of international languages. As the process of language instruction improves in the light of state of the art



pedagogical technologies, there appears to be much more space for the exploration of testing or assessment procedures relying on the best testing practices such as employing accurate and plausible objectivity, proof-based subjective evaluation, content and construct-validity, reliability, practicality and authentic communication-rich or pragmatics-oriented testing techniques.

Language assessment is a measure of the proficiency a language user has in any given language. It could be a first or second language. Tests are one form of language assessment and there are many others. They fall into two categories: summative and formative.

There are three main concepts in determining meaningful language assessment: validity, reliability, and feasibility.

1. Validity means that what is assessed should actually be assessed.
2. Reliability refers to the accuracy of the decisions made from the assessment.
3. Feasibility means that the assessment has to be practical.

A language assessment can cover one or more of the following four key skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is the international standard for defining the proficiency of language learners. On a six-point scale of ability at A1-C2, it describes what learners should be able to as they progress in language learning. In reverse order of ability, the progression points are: Proficient, Independent and Basic. These are then broken into two level. Language assessment has two main forms: achievement assessment and proficiency assessment.

- Achievement assessment is the completion of specific objectives set out by a course. It refers to work completed in lessons. It measures the extent to which the pupil has met the learning goals in a given time-frame such as a lesson, series of lessons, or an entire course.
- Proficiency assessment is the assessment of a pupils' ability - what they know and what they can do in the real world. It measures a learner's proficiency in a context outside the classroom.

A number of scholarly works are being conducted in the Republic of Uzbekistan considering the effectiveness of fair and objective assessment in language education to enhance the learning and acquisition of foreign languages, especially English in



both state and private educational institutions and schools. The Cabinet of Ministers' resolution adopted in May, 2013 on "Endorsing state educational standard on foreign language in continuous education" allowed educators and teaching professionals along with researchers in the fields of linguistics and foreign language pedagogy to take unprecedented actions in reinforcing and enhancing educational research knowledge and pedagogical competencies in conducting fair and effective instruction in foreign languages. According to this resolution, foreign language competence and skills assessment should be aligned with CEFR assessment scale. The new adoption of the educational standard is still enabling both teachers and students to explore and employ learning, assessment and results obtained through classroom practices from diverse linguistic and didactic angles.

Republic of Uzbekistan implements in the following stages foreign language learning based on state educational standards in the system of continuous education. In continuous education, foreign language learning involves foreign language knowledge and skills competence and proficiency in

- ❖ General secondary education –primary 4<sup>th</sup> class graduates at CEFR A1 Breakthrough level; 9th grade graduates at A2 Waystage level; foreign language specialized school graduates at A2+ Waystage
- ❖ Secondary special and professional education – graduates of not specialized academic lyceums, Profession colleges graduates at B1 Threshold , foreign languages specialized academic lyceums graduates (second foreign language)at B1+ Threshold
- ❖ Higher education – undergraduate-bachelor's students of higher education faculties where foreign language is non-specialty subject at B2 Vantage ; graduate-Master's students of higher education faculties where foreign language is non-specialty subject at B2 Vantage; undergraduate-bachelor's students of higher education faculties where foreign language is specialty (second foreign language) at B2 Vantage
- ❖ Higher education – undergraduate-bachelor's students of higher education faculties where foreign language is specialty at C1 Advanced; graduate-Master's students of higher education faculties where foreign language is specialty subject at C1 Advanced



On the basis of this standard, taking into account the characteristics of the educational institution for foreign languages (English, French, German and other languages), control and evaluation indicators for state certification, educational programs are developed and approved by the orders of the relevant ministries. The state educational standard for continuous education in foreign languages specifies the following: goals and tasks of academic subject; the content of teaching and learning a foreign language; requirements for compulsory training levels of graduates of educational institutions at all stages of education.

The main goal of teaching a foreign language at all stages of education in the Republic of Uzbekistan is the formation of communicative competence in a foreign language so that students can work in everyday, scientific and professional fields in a multicultural world.

Foreign language communicative competence is the ability to use the knowledge, skills and abilities acquired in the foreign language in the process of communication. In the resolution document of The Cabinet of Ministers May, 2013 on “Endorsing state educational standard on foreign language in continuous education” competencies are divided into the following groups:

Linguistic competence implies knowledge of language material (phonetics, lexicon, grammar) and acquisition of skills in speech activities (listening, speaking, reading and writing).

Sociolinguistic competence makes it possible to choose the necessary linguistic form and expression method based on a speech situation, communicative goal and desire of the speaker. Sociolinguistic competence includes socio-cultural competence and shows the ability to present the national features of authentic speech: knowledge of customs, values, traditions and other national-cultural features of the country where one lives and comparing it with the country where the language is being studied. Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to deal with difficult situations by repeatedly asking, apologizing, etc. In this standard, discourse competence is included in pragmatic competence. This competence involves expressing thoughts in oral or written speech using appropriate language tools. Discourse competence refers to the ability to understand and interpret linguistic signals to ensure consistency in oral or written speech.



Another notable document on increasing the emphasis and popularization of foreign language promotion along with popularization of foreign language assessment employment according to national and international language testing standards, the decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan PQ-5117, 2021 “On measures to raise the popularization of learning foreign languages to a qualitatively new level”, has extended pedagogical innovations in proficiency testing and has brought about massive improvements and changes in the acceptance, employment and promotion of international exams such as TOEFL, IELTS, Aptis for Teachers, iTEP Academic-Plus, Cambridge English assessment tests like CAE and FCE, other exams in foreign languages, CELI, CILS in Italian, Goethe Certificate in German and others. The promotion of foreign language proficiency exams in the Republic allows both trainers in foreign language instructions and students/candidates taking academic course in foreign languages to take advantage of international or national certification of knowledge and competence making them ready for access to prestigious jobs and academic careers.

### **MAIN BODY**

Linguodidactic approaches to EFL and ESL instruction and assessment exist in different ways, and techniques for accurate and criterion-referenced assessment on particular language skills and competence have been widely investigated by popular foreign scholars such as L.Bachman, A.Hughs, Crystal, D, Dudley-Evans, Barron, A, Celcia-Murcia, R.West, Seleznev V.N, Barchodoeva L.A and contemporary scholars from Uzbekistan, J. Jalolov, Makhkamova G, Muradkasimova K.Sh and Istamova D.S.

We have considerably noticed through our literature review looking into the history of language assessment that language testing has passed through the main three generations, in compliance with three generations of language teaching. Various writers have called the generations differently with the indication of their characteristics.



Generation-teaching approach	Spolsky 1975	Morrow 1979
1. Grammar-translation	pre-scientific	'Garden of Eden'
2. Structural	psychometric-structuralist	'Vale of Tears'
3. Communicative	psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic	'Promised Land'

The first generation of language testing relied on grammar-translation items as well as items derived from native speaker testing such as unstructured interviews and decontextualized compositions asking learners to write, 200 words about a day at the seaside or a visit to a local place of interest. Tests of this kind came to be severely criticized and regarded as subjective, and therefore unscientific, unreliable and unfair.

The second generation of language testing, therefore, aimed to be objective, scientific, reliable and fair. This not only fitted with the aim of contemporary linguistics to be scientific, but it also was very much in tune with current views of language.

The matter to be tested is language. Language is built of sounds, intonation, stress, morphemes, words and arrangements of words having meanings that are linguistic and cultural...Each of these elements of language constitutes a variable that will want to test. (R. Lado 1961).

If each part of language is to be taught separately, it follows, as Lado suggests, that it can be isolated and tested separately. R. Lado suggested distinctions between objective and subjective tests in the following way.

These terms are used to designate two ways of scoring. Objective tests are those that are scored rather mechanically without need to evaluate complex performance on a scale. Subjective tests are those that require an opinion, a judgment on the part of the examiner. In subjective tests, there are differences in scoring by different examiners, hence the name subjective.

Tests targeted at assessing discrete categories or units of language can involve techniques such as blank completion or gap-filling, joining elements, arranging



elements, matching elements, transformation and multiple choice. For example, Multiple choice – The students passes very .....assignments last time. A. pass B. passes C. passed D. would pass; balank completion – I \_\_\_\_\_ (have to) love reading a lot on Saturdays; joining elements –We would like to see this phenomenon as revolutionary act in science. Everyone may write a short essay discussing the advantages of the scientific breakthrough.

Most scholarship on integrative, communicative- pragmatic assessment comes from the point of view of the researcher, rather than the teacher. Unlike discrete-point testing, integrative testing makes use of the principles of communication along with specific language units such as grammar, vocabulary and discourse, to allow straightforward communication between the student/test-taker and the assessment task. An example would be to match functions such as agreeing, praising or complimenting to statements from the passage or reading or listening in Multiple-choice task or to determine the implied meaning of the utterance in discourser, for example, the writer/the author means, implies that .....when he gives an example of....or restates an opinion on the matter of free-lancing in the job market and others. Kasper and Rose (2002) list nine possible methods of pragmatic data collection, divided into three subcategories. Spoken interaction includes Authentic Discourse, Elicited Conversation, and Role Play. Questionnaires includes Discourse Completion tasks (DCTs), Multiple-Choice questions, and Scaled-Response Questionnaires. Oral and Written Self-Report includes Interviews, Think-Aloud Protocols, and Diaries. Two of the most used are DCTs and role-plays.

The study of task complexity is a research field in itself. Most research is based on the effects of task complexity on language complexity, accuracy, and fluency, following either Foster and Skehan's (1996) Trade-off model or Robinson's (2001) Cognition Hypothesis. Included in this topic is measurement of lexical complexity, which may be related to pragmalinguistic knowledge. Gilabert, Barón, and Levkina (2011) found that lexical diversity increased in some forms of complex task, but not others, as participants had to justify or over-explain their decisions and instructions. Similarly, Michel (2011) found that making a task more complex by manipulating the number of elements led to greater lexical diversity for both L1 and L2 speakers. Fewer researchers have investigated the effects of task complexity on sociopragmatic awareness or appropriateness. Taguchi (2007) found that



manipulating politeness variables of social distance, power, and level of imposition led to a decrease in appropriateness of pragmatic forms used, an effect she suggested was due to insufficient pragmalinguistic resources. Gilabert and Barón (2013) investigated the effects of task complexity on the use of pragmatic moves, and found that task complexity increased the number of pragmatic moves used, but not the variety. Task type, however, was found to influence the type of pragmatic structures utilized by the participants. Kim and Taguchi (2015) found that increasing complexity by increasing reasoning demands in a collaborative writing task did not affect the quality of task performance, but did increase metalinguistic discussion of pragmatic elements, leading to longer term retention of the target pragmalinguistic forms.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the development of the communicative approach to language teaching has placed more emphasis on broader communicative competence, within it, pragmatic competence rather than narrower linguistic competence alone. This change has put a premium on the productive skills, especially speaking and writing skills. These are precisely the areas of language which are least suited to objective testing. If speaking and writing are to be taught and no communicative teacher would claim that they should not be, they should be tested, and if they are tested they will have to be tested subjectively.

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