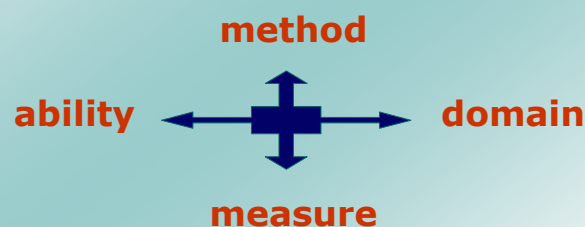


Unit 2. Purposes of language tests and the relation of language test type and purpose of assessment

What is a test?

A test is a **method** of **measuring** a **person's ability** or knowledge in a given **domain** (lg, maths, car driving, etc.).



Method

- ✓ A test is a method –i.e. it's a **set of techniques, procedures, and items** which constitute an instrument of some sort that requires performance or activity on the part of the test-taker.
- ✓ The method can be **intuitive or informal** (e.g. a holistic impression on someone's pronunciation), **or formal, explicit and structured**, as with m-c tests.

Measure (1)

- ✓ Some measurements are broad & inexact; others are quantified in mathematically precise terms.
- ✓ The difference bt formal & informal assessment is very much associated to the **quantification of data**. Thus, **informal & intuitive judgement** made by teachers as part of everyday teaching is difficult to quantify –i.e. judgements are rendered in global terms. So we say "a poor reader", "he pronounces well", etc.

Measure (2)

✓ On the other hand, **formal tests**, in which carefully planned techniques of assessment are used, rely more on quantification, especially for comparison either **within an individual** (say, at beginning & end of course) or **across individuals**.

Ability

✓ A test measures **ability or competence**: it samples performance but infers certain competence. E.g.:

- A driving test requires a sample of performance on the part of the test-taker & that performance is used by tester(s) to infer the person's general competence to drive a car. Similarly,
- A lg test samples lg behavior and infers general ability in a lg.

Domain

- ✓ A test measures a given domain.
- ✓ In the case of a proficiency test, although the actual performance involves only a sampling of skills, that domain is overall proficiency in a lg – i.e. general proficiency in all skills of a lg.

Purpose of assessment (1)

Five main reasons to carry out assessment of student language learning can be identified. Assessment is done...

- for placement purposes –i.e. to know exactly in what lg program or course the student needs to register;
- for diagnostic purposes –i.e. to detect language weaknesses or language learning difficulties and modify lg teaching accordingly (formative);

Purpose of assessment (2)

- to detect student progress or achievement in Ig learning –i.e. whether student Ig ability has improved by the middle or the end of the Ig course than at the beginning (progress) or whether students have learned what they were supposed to learn in the Ig course (achievement);
- to establish student level of Ig proficiency –e.g. so as to be accepted in an English-speaking university;
- for accountability purposes.

Placement

- ✓ P.Ts can be used to place students in the right class in a school.
- ✓ P.Ts are used to show how good a student's English is in relation to a previously agreed system of levels.
- ✓ P.Ts are usually based on the syllabi and materials the students will use once their level has been decided on.
- ✓ P.Ts are meant to assess knowledge of language elements (mainly grammar and vocabulary) and language skills.

Diagnosis

✓ **D.Ts are used to expose learner difficulties, gaps in their knowledge, and skill deficiencies during a course.**

(When we know what the problems are, we can do whatever necessary to solve them)

Progress / Achievement

✓ **The aim of progress & achievement assessment is to measure learners' lg & skill progress in relation to the syllabus they have been following.**

✓ **Achievement and progress assessment must reflect progress, not failure. That is, they should reinforce the learning that has taken place, not student weaknesses.**

✓ **Progress and achievement assessment can help teachers decide on changes to future teaching programs where students do significantly worse than expected.**

Proficiency

- ✓ **Proficiency assessment gives a general picture of a student's knowledge and ability (rather than measure progress).**
- ✓ **Proficiency assessment is usually used as stages people have to reach to be admitted to a foreign university, to get a job, to obtain some kind of certificate.**
- ✓ **Proficiency assessment has a profound backwash effect since, where there are external exams, students obviously want/need to pass them, and teachers' reputations sometimes depend upon how many of them succeed.**

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Accountability

- ✓ **Assessment of student learning is also carried out in order to provide educational and funding authorities with evidence that intended learning outcomes have been achieved and to justify expenditure.**

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Lg test types & purposes

Aptitude tests	Lg dominance tests
Goal: to determine a learner's capacity to learn a lg (ANY lg).	Goal: to assess potentially bilingual children in both lgs they have been exposed to so as to see which is the stronger or dominant lg for purposes of instruction.

Lg test types & purposes

Proficiency tests	Placement tests
Goal: To determine someone's proficiency in a lg.	Goal: To define a student's lg skills relative to the levels of a particular program they are about to enter.

Lg test types & purposes

Diagnostic tests

Goal: To identify students' strengths and weaknesses in the L2.

☞ These tests are closely related to the syllabuses of the specific classes so that the teachers can decide how to gear the instruction to be most appropriate for the students in that class.

☞ These tests are also used in learning centers or self-access study programs to help the students themselves decide where to focus their attention.

Lg test types & purposes

Progress tests

Goal: To determine how well students are doing with the material that has been covered. These tests are used as part of **ongoing / formative assessment**. Obviously, these tests must be closely tied to course content.

Achievement tests

Goal: To determine, at the end of a course of instruction, how well the learners have mastered the skills or knowledge presented in it. These tests are ideally based on the objectives of the course.

What tests SHOULD NOT be used for

- 👉 **Do not use tests as punishment –e.g. because no one did the assigned homework, etc.**
- 👉 **Do not use tests as the only measure for grading/of assessment.**
- 👉 **Do not use tests as an assessment tool that does not reflect what has been taught.**
- 👉 **Do not return tests without corrections or explanations (i.e. without feedback).**

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What tests SHOULD NOT be used for

- 👉 **Do not use only tests, bc they reflect just one assessment method.**
- 👉 **Do not use tests without training students to take them.**
- 👉 **Do not take too long to return tests to the students**
- 👉 **Do not use tests with which you (teacher) are not confident.**

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What tests SHOULD really do

- 👍 **Testing should be seen as an opportunity for interaction bt teacher and student.**
- 👍 **Tests should reflect student lg knowledge.**
- 👍 **Tests should help students improve lg skills.**
- 👍 **Criteria for success on test should be clear to students.**

What tests should REALLY do

- 👍 **Students should receive a grade for performance on a set of tests representing different testing methods, not just one.**
- 👍 **Students should be trained to take the test.**
- 👍 **Tests should be returned promptly and with adequate feedback.**

Ask yourself, as a way of reflection on the contents of this presentation, questions such as the following:



How can a test become an opportunity for interaction between the teacher and the students?



Do you think it is possible or even useful to the student to go through this kind of interaction with the teacher over a test? Do you think students approach this with the right attitude? What about teachers?



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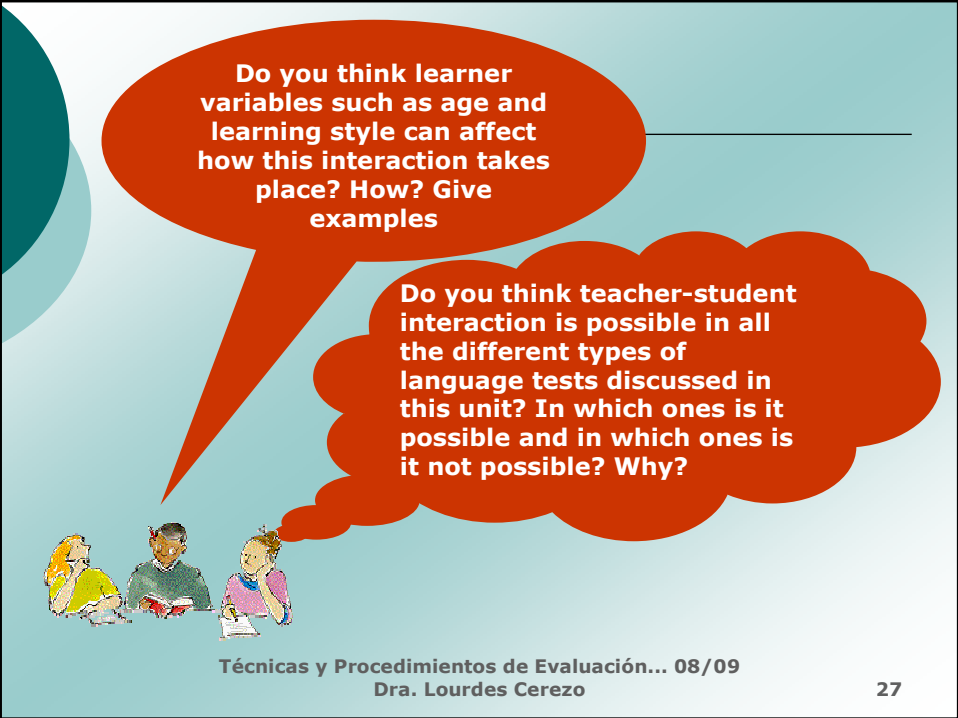
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Have you ever been in a situation of interaction with your teacher about a test that you have taken? What was this situation like? Do you think the interaction was successful (i.e. useful to you as a student of that particular course?)



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Do you think learner variables such as age and learning style can affect how this interaction takes place? How? Give examples

Do you think teacher-student interaction is possible in all the different types of language tests discussed in this unit? In which ones is it possible and in which ones is it not possible? Why?

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