Assessment and testing: assessing language skills

By: Assist. Lecturer: Ibrahim A. Ahmed
Outline

❖ Definitions of Assessment and Testing
❖ Principles of language assessment
❖ Types of tests
Defining assessment and testing

Assessment: “is an inclusive term that refers to an ongoing process of monitoring or keeping track of the learner’s progress and it is part of the whole educational process of teaching and learning.” (Hedge, 2004: 376)

(Assessment) can be formal and informal.

Informal assessment: refers to the incidental, unplanned comments such as nice job! learners are performing a task.

Formal assessment: exercises and procedures specifically design to measure skills or knowledge.

Testing: “is a method of measuring a person’s ability or knowledge in a given domain, with an emphasis on the concepts of methods and measuring.” (Brown, 2007: 445)
Principles of Language Tests

- Test: this would be a term used to refer to both tests and formal assessment.

- Principles are considered as guidelines in order to design a new test or assessment and to evaluate the efficacy of an existing one.

➢ Practicality
➢ Reliability
➢ Liability
➢ Validity
➢ Authenticity
➢ Washback
Practicality

An effective practical test:

➢ is not excessively expensive.

➢ stays within appropriate time constraint,

➢ is relatively easy to administer,

➢ has a scoring/evaluation procedure that is specific and time-efficient.
Reliability

➢ A reliable test is consistent and dependable.
➢ A test can be unreliable because of factor beyond the test-taker such as noise, illness, bad day, or no sleep.
➢ Score reliability refers to the consistency of scoring by two or more scorers.
➢ Being subjective affects our reliability.
➢ Scoring direction must be clear in order to have a consistent and dependable test.
Validity

➢ It refers to the degree to which the test actually measures what is intended to measure. For example, If we ask Ss to write for 15 minutes as much as they can, the test may be practical, reliable, but not valid.

Three types of validation:

1. **Content validity.** - it refers to the ability a learner can have in performing the actual content which is measured. E.g., if a person is taught how to speak a second language in a specific setting and then tested on grammar issues, it does not achieve content validity.

2. **Face validity.** - it refers to whether the test on the face of it, appears from the learner’s perspective to test what it is designed to test.

3. **Construct validity.** - e.g., oral proficiency requires several factors such as: pronunciation, fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary and so on, but if it only considers pronunciation and grammar, it lacks construct validity.

-Standardized test does not suffer from construct validity but content validity,
Authenticity

➢ It is the degree of correspondence of a given language test task to the features of a target language task.
➢ When we say that a test is authentic we mean that it can be applied in the real world.
➢ It means tests should not be artificial.

Tests are authentic when:

➔ The language in a test is as natural as possible.
➔ Items contextualized rather than isolated.
➔ Topics are meaningful (relevant, interesting) for the learner.
➔ Some thematic organization to items is provided, such as through a story line or episode.
➔ Tasks represent, or closely approximate, real-world tasks.
Washback

➢ Tests are useful only when teachers provide students with feedback praising or encouraging Ss to keep studying hard, rather than only a letter grade or a numerical score.

➢ It means, giving a praise, constructive criticism of weaknesses, strategic hints to be better next time.

➢ Washback gives students the opportunity to discuss the feedback and evaluation given and obtain clarification.

➢ Washback can serve Ss as review techniques for coming tests.

➢ Washback enhances a series of language principles such as self-confidence, language ego, intrinsic motivation, etc.,
Types of tests

**Placement tests:** They are used to place new students in their right class or level in a school or a language center.

**Diagnostic tests:** They are used to expose learner difficulties, gaps in their knowledge and skill deficiency during a course.

**Progress or achievement tests:** These tests are related directly to classroom lessons, units or even a whole curriculum.

**Proficiency tests:** They give a general picture of a student’s knowledge and ability in a language.

**Aptitude test:** It is designed to measure a person's capacity or general ability to learn a foreign language.
The importance of assessment and judgement

“Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish on its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

Albert Einstein
Thanks for your attendance

Questions and comments are appreciated
References

