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TESTING IN OUR LIFE

SUMMARY

Testing in our life

The article is dedicated to testing in the process of teaching and learning. The aim is to clarify what a language test is and to show its purpose. Moreover, the conditions of a reliable and valid test are presented here as well as some tips how to overcome difficulties connected with taking tests.

Key words: test, purpose of testing, types of tests, skills, coping with tests

STRESZCZENIE

Testowanie w naszym życiu

Artykuł poświęcony jest testowaniu w procesie uczenia i nauczania. Celem pracy jest wyjaśnienie czym jest test językowy i do czego służy. Ponadto przedstawiono warunki skonstruowania wiarygodnego i trafnego testu, jak również przekazano rady jak pokonać trudności podczas testowania.

Introduction

Life is nowadays perceived as an entanglement packed with diverse problems. With no hesitation testing can be conceived as one of the biggest dilemmas at the moment as, on the one hand, almost every human being is required to supplement their education and, on the other hand, teachers are obliged to use tests as

a useful tool of assessing students almost endlessly. However, the problem of testing and being tested is not arising today. Although reluctant to that instrument of checking one's adjustment to everyday situations, each conscious being has been judged through their life. From the moment a child is given birth, his or her life is checked. Thus, why do we not want to be tested? Do tests have bad influence on human life? Is it not possible for a simple test to motivate to get knowledge? The aim of the article is to examine the influence of testing on foreign language learning.

We will try to clarify not only what a language test is but also its purpose. It can be perceived worldwide that although a whole range of scientists give numerous definitions to tests, all of them have something in common – they are used to measure something, usually one's knowledge. Nonetheless, created not to worry, tests often make students reluctant to them. Apart from that, there can be found teachers who seem to be exhausted with tests. The aim of the article is to check why the problem arises and how to show both teachers and students that tests can be helpful. There is also a need to find a way for a number of students to overcome difficulties connected with being tested.

Language tests

„Testing is a universal feature of social life. Throughout history people have been put to the test to prove their capabilities or to establish their credentials" as McNamara[1] points out. Life without testing is almost impossible. It is an accepted part of everyday situations nowadays. However, tests are met anywhere in the world, they are still not liked by students. They often wonder why tests exist and who, in fact, created them and what for. Young pupils do not pay attention to tests at the very beginning and even do not realize they take them. However, when they grow up, they start to be reluctant to tests claiming that they are created to destroy students' lives or just to bother them.

What is a language test?
Students usually grudgingly talk about tests as they associate them with marks, learning and stress. They cannot even imagine that a test can be a set of tasks to measure their ability and skills. In fact, the definition that a test is a harmful item to ruin students' life does not exist. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*[2]

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1   T. McNamara, *Language Testing,* Oxford 2000, s. 3.
2   *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English,* Harlow 2005, s. 1712.

explains that a test is an „exam, a set of questions, exercises, or practical activities to measure someone's skill, ability, or knowledge (...)". Oxford Wordpower[3] defines a test as „a short examination to measure sb's knowledge or skill in sth". Bachman[4] clarifies that „a test is a measurement instrument designed to elicit a specific sample of an individual's behavior". Ur[5] claims that „a test may be defined as an activity whose main purpose is to convey (usually to the tester) how well the testee knows or can do something. This is in contrast to practice, whose main purpose is sheer learning". The author also points out that „tests are mostly used for assessment: the test gives a score which is assumed to define the level of knowledge of the testee"[6].

It can be easily perceived that though a considerable number of test definitions exist, each of them has a meaning of evaluation or measurement of somebody or something. What about language tests? For a whole range of scientists what is claimed about tests in general can be stated with reference to language tests.

To demonstrate how arduous and time consuming test constructing can be, McNamara[7] compares it to a road building where testers can be likened to engineers. The author asserts that tests just like roads are complicated to build and extremely technical.

Purpose of testing and types of tests

It is widely realised that teachers have their own aims for testing, other aims exist for students and completely diverse testing purposes emerge for authorities. Following Heaton[8], a great number of reasons for measuring students' knowledge of languages exist. The most important for him „is to find out how well the students have mastered the language areas and skills which have just been taught"[9]. Hughes[10] mentions the fact that universities could not accept any foreign students without proper knowledge about their level of proficiency. Moreover, individual students need to be provided with a statement to what extent they have mastered the second or a foreign language. Apart from that, teachers and officials should be informed about the progress of learners.

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3   *Oxford Wordpower,* 2005, s. 783.
4   L. F. Bachman, *Fundamental Considerations In Language Testing,* Oxford 1995, s. 20.
5   P. Ur, *A Course In Language Teaching*, Cambridge 1996, s. 33.
6   Ibidem.
7   T. McNamara, *Language Testing...*, s. 607.
8   J. B. Heaton, *Classroom Testing,* London 1991, s. 9-17.
9   Ibidem, s. 9.
10 A. Hughes, *Testing for Language Teachers,* Cambridge 1989, s. 4.

Alderson, Clapham and Wall[11] believe that the purpose of testing is tightly correlated with types of tests. Following this point of view, Komorowska[12] explains that there are various test classifications, however, it is difficult to choose which one is the most preferable. Nevertheless, she claims that tests usually tend to fall into one of the following categories:

a. According to the form of testing:
   – paper and pencil tests;
   – oral tests;
   – verbal tests;
   – picture tests.

b. According to the content of testing:
   – language elements tests (phonology/ spelling/ vocabulary and grammar);
   – language skills tests (speaking/ listening/ reading and writing).

c. According to the frame of reference:
   – norm-referenced tests;
   – criterion-referenced tests.

d. According to the number of elements tested:
   – discrete point tests;
   – integrative tests.

e. According to the purpose of testing:
   – proficiency tests;
   – placement tests;
   – achievement tests;
   – diagnostic tests;
   – and prognostic tests.

Komorowska[13] points out that the last classification is quite commonly accepted. According to her, **proficiency tests** are not based on a specific programme as they are created to test the ability of students with various backgrounds. Proficiency tests give not only a certificate of one's language ability but, for instance, determine whether a student is qualified enough to study abroad.

Another test described by the mentioned author is a **placement test**. Komorowska[14], as well as Hughes[15] and Alderson[16] et al., assert that it is intended to

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[11]   C. J. Alderson, C. Clapham, D. Wall, *Language Test Construction and Evaluation*, Cambridge 1995, s. 11-12.

[12]   H. Komorowska, *Sprawdzanie umiejętności w nauce języka obcego. Kontrola – ocena – testowanie*, Warszawa 2004, s. 15-17.

[13]   H. Komorowska, *Sprawdzanie umiejętności w nauce...*, s. 17.

[14]   Ibidem, s. 20.

[15]   A. Hughes, *Testing for Language...*, s. 9-14.

[16]   C. J. Alderson, C. Clapham, D. Wall, *Language Test Construction...*, s. 11-12.

assess students' level of language ability to place them at the appropriate stage in the class or course. Heaton[17] clarifies that placement tests ought to be as general as possible. Thus, teachers should avoid focusing on narrow domains of language skills.

The following – **achievement test**, is described in a slightly different way. The authors agree that this is a type of test usually based on the syllabus or a textbook, that is why it should be directly related to the language course. However, Komorowska[18] clarifies that the aim of such a measurement is to determine to what extent students have mastered the material. According to her, short quizzes, tests or the 'Matura' exams can be found among achievement tests. On the other hand, Alderson, Clapham and Wall[19] argue that achievement tests are given only at the end of a course. The tests given at various stages throughout the course are called **progress tests**. In Hughes's[20] view two kinds of achievement tests exist. The first one is a **final achievement test** and the second one is a **progress achievement test**. Those final tests are taken at the end of a course and may be prepared and administered by members of teaching institutions, official examining boards or by ministries of education while progress achievement tests are usually prepared by teachers themselves and given to students to check their progress. Despite the fact that „the content of a final achievement test should be based directly on a detailed course syllabus or on the books and other materials used"[21], a huge disadvantage can be perceived when the syllabus is carelessly planned or the books or materials used throughout a course are mistakenly picked out. The results of tests can be sheerly deceptive then.

The next test, **diagnostic test**, is intended to identify the areas in which students need some further help or, in other words, what further teaching is essential. However, Alderson, Clapham and Wall[22] explain that it is not so easy to design a good and purely diagnostic test as „it is difficult to diagnose precisely strengths and weaknesses in the complexities of language ability". Hughes[23] asserts that such a test should contain a number of examples for students to guarantee a proper choice rather than a response made by chance.

The last test mentioned by Komorowska[24] is a **prognostic test** whose aim is to determine any prospective successes of students. Komorowska[25] adds that lan-

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17 J. B. Heaton, *Classroom Testing*..., s. 15.
18 H. Komorowska, *Sprawdzanie umiejętności w nauce*..., s. 18.
19 C. J. Alderson, C. Clapham, D. Wall, *Language Test Construction*..., s. 11-12.
20 A. Hughes, *Testing for Language*..., s. 10-13.
21 Ibidem, s. 11.
22 C. J. Alderson, C. Clapham, D. Wall, *Language Test Construction*..., s. 12.
23 A. Hughes, *Testing for Language*..., s. 13.
24 H. Komorowska, *Sprawdzanie umiejętności w nauce*..., s. 18.
25 Ibidem, s. 20.

guage abilities may undergo changes depending on various factors such as age, cognitive experience or the influence of various attitudes. She clarifies that also motivation, individual features, general intelligence, memory and character can bring changes to the learning process. That is why it cannot be stated that the results of prognostic tests are solely correct and fully justified.

Content of the test

It is rather arduous to construct a good test as there is a great number of problems connected with it. One of the most important dilemmas is what should be included in the test. According to Heaton[26], the material students have learned in the classroom ought not to be used for testing. However, as it is important to measure what a test is supposed to measure, teachers should use the material that covers the same language domain and involve analogous tasks.

Following Krashen's[27] theory about the input hypothesis, it must be said that „a necessary (...) condition to move from stage i to stage $i + 1$ is that the acquirer understands input that contains $i + 1$, where "understand" means that the acquirer is focused on the meaning and not the form of the message". He also explains that one acquires only when he understands language that contains a structure that is „a little beyond" where one is now. Apart from linguistic competence one should use context, knowledge of the world and extra-linguistic information to help understand language directed to him. Taking that into account, it can be said that a test should also have some tasks more difficult than those practiced at school.

In Heaton's[28] view deciding what to put in or what to leave out of the test may be difficult and complicated. Everything depends on the type of a test. In most cases, however, the syllabus or a textbook should be carefully examined and borne in mind while composing a good test. Having established this idea, Heaton then goes on to assert that close cooperation with other teachers can undoubtedly help to select material and construct a good test.

Test validity

Even if tests can be sometimes stressful and make people anxious, they are needed and useful. However, it can be stated from various points of view that not every test is acceptable. Harris implies that a dependable test needs to meet some errorless standards. At first, it must be solid, which means, it must give the same purports under various conditions. Furthermore, it must be valid, which means it should measure what it is supposed to measure. Apart from that, a good test

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[26]   J. B. Heaton, *Classroom Testing...,* s. 11.
[27]   S. D. Krashen, *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition,* Hertfordshire 1987, s. 21.
[28]   J. B. Heaton, *Classroom Testing...,* s. 14-16.

ought to be practical, that is economical – not only easy to score, but also easy to interpret[29].

Krashen[30] adds, however, that each test has an immense effect on classroom behaviour, and needs to be selected to motivate students to involve in such actions which will support them in acquiring more language. With no doubt it should be remembered that a test should test what it is supposed to do. Why is it so important? Alderson, Clapham and Wall[31] explain that it is crucial for a test to be valid as only then the scores mean what they are assumed to mean. But what is that validity? Henning[32] defines it as follows:

„Validity in general refers to the appropriateness of a given test or any of its component parts as a measure of what it is purported to measure. A test is said to be valid to the extent that it measures what it is supposed to measure. It follows that the term *valid* when used to describe a test should usually be accompanied by the preposition *for*. Any test then may be valid for some purposes, but not for others".

According to Hughes[33], a whole range of aspects must be revealed to examine validity. The author explains that: „A test is said to have **content validity** if its content constitutes a representative sample of the language skills, structures, etc. with which it is meant to be concerned"[34]. Hughes maintains that skills, structures and any other important elements which are going to be checked ought to be selected at the very beginning of test construction. Then, he emphasises that not everything can appear in a test. However, it should be remembered that the elements which are not tested should not be ignored in the learning process[35].

Another approach of validation is **criterion-related validity**. According to Hughes[36], it „is to see how far results on the test agree with those provided by some independent and highly dependable assessment of the candidate's ability".

The next validation concept is known as **construct validity**. According to Cronbach[37], „Every time an educator asks 'but what does the instrument really measure?' he is calling for information on construct validity". Komorowska[38] adds that to secure construct validity it is good to care about checking one's ability with

29 D. Harris, *Testing English as a Second Language,* New York 1969, s. 21-22.
30 S. D. Krashen, *Principles and Practice...,* s. 177.
31 C. J. Alderson, C. Clapham, D. Wall, *Language Test Construction...,* s. 170.
32 G. Henning, *A Guide to Language Testing*, Cambridge 1987, s. 89.
33 A. Hughes, *Testing for Language...,* s. 22.
34 Ibidem.
35 Ibidem, s. 22-23.
36 Ibidem, s. 23.
37 L. J. Cronbach, *Test validation,* [w:] *Educational measurement,* R. L. Thorndike (red.), Washington 1971, s. 463.
38 H. Komorowska, *Sprawdzanie umiejętności w nauce...,* s. 24.

more than one task. What is more, those tasks ought to be constructed in various ways, nonetheless, the obtained results should be quite related.

A proper test should also have **face validity**. Anastasi[39] asserts that it: is not validity in the technical sense; it refers, not to what the test actually measures, but to what it appears superficially to measure. Face validity pertains to whether the test 'looks valid' to the examinees who take it, the administrative personnel who decide on its use, and other technically untrained observers. Fundamentally, the question of face validity concerns rapport and public relations.

Hughes[40] argues that unless a test is provided with face validity, students as well as teachers, education institutions or employers may not accept it. If it happens that such a test is given to students, they may „not perform on it in a way that truly reflects their ability"[41].

Test reliability

It is common knowledge that only those devices, household appliances, cars or even friends are noteworthy and receive general recognition which are supposed to be reliable. According to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*[42], „someone or something that is reliable can be trusted or depended on". What about tests? Does it occur that tests are not reliable? If they are constructed to measure something, and they seem to measure it, can it happen that the results demonstrate something one cannot rely on, something utterly different? Davis[43] stresses that: „reliability is the first essential for any test; but for certain kinds of language test it may be very difficult to achieve".

Hughes[44] emphasises that it is widely realised that the scores of tests do not always pass the same kind of information. It is obvious that an examinee with the same knowledge depending on various conditions can achieve different results taking the same test for the second time.

Komorowska[45] as well as Hughes[46] assert that there is an immense number of rules that ought to be taken into consideration while a reliable test is constructed. Among the principles mentioned by the authors there are the following:

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39 A. Anastasi, *Psychological Testing,* London 1982, s. 136.
40 A. Hughes, *Testing for Language...,* s. 27.
41 Ibidem.
42 *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English,* Harlow 2005, s. 1386.
43 A. Davies, *Proficiency in English as a Second Language,* PhD thesis, University of Birmingham 1965, s. 14.
44 A. Hughes, *Testing for Language...,* s. 29.
45 H. Komorowska, *Sprawdzanie umiejętności w nauce...,* s. 29.
46 A. Hughes, *Testing for Language...,* s. 38-42.

– Is the timing for a test properly chosen? Is the test not too long?
– Are there sufficient fundamentals for the tester to draw conclusions? Is the test not too short?
– Are short quizzes marked with points and is the final mark an average of a few short tests?
– Are all the items unambiguous?
– Is the test not too difficult or not too easy?
– Do individual tasks have sufficient discriminatory power: are they solved by less than 15% or more than 85% of the examinees?
– Is each version of the test equivalent?
– Are the rules clear?
– Is a detailed key provided to the test?
– Are there clear instructions for scorers?
– Are examinees provided with clear instructions?
– Is the test well laid and legible?
– Are the testees familiar with both format and testing techniques?
– Are conditions of administration non-distracting (e.g. acoustic)?
– Are candidates not given too much freedom?
– Is an examinee identified by a number, not name?
– Is it possible to employ at least two scorers when testing can be subjective?

Following Weir[47], it can be stated that even if one obtains a reliable test, it may occur that it is not valid. Then, the author emphasises that a test may only be valid if it is reliable. According to him, „it is sometimes essential to sacrifice a degree of reliability in order to enhance validity. If, however, validity is lost to increase reliability we finish up with a test which is a reliable measure of something other than what we wish to measure"[48].

Testing language elements and skills

According to Lado language is built of sounds and words with their cultural and linguistic meaning with appropriate grammar structures[49]. Nothing, however, exists separately but is combined and recognised as language skills. Even though each element or ability can be taught, learnt and tested independently, they never occur apart from others in language. Thus, each item can be tested separately and as a whole.

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47 C. J. Weir, *Communicative Language Testing,* Hemel Hempstead 1990, s. 33.
48 Ibidem.
49 R. Lado, *Language Testing. The Construction and Use of Foreign Language Tests. Teacher's Book,* London 1961, s. 25.

Grammar

There was a time when teachers taught and tested nothing but grammar structures. However, a lot has changed with the communicative approach arrival. Students started to be tested with other instruments as their skills began to be of interest. Nonetheless, nowadays, teachers are coming back to testing grammar as, according to Hughes[50], there are a great number of virtues. To start with, it is easy to score and administer a large number of items within a short time. What is more, the lack of grammatical ability limits what could be achieved in one's performance. Furthermore, a successful writing cannot exist without proper knowledge of grammar.

Vocabulary

Contrary to grammar, there is no doubt that „knowledge of vocabulary is essential to the development and demonstration of linguistic skills"[51]. Nation[52] as well as Komorowska[53] ponder over the knowledge of a word. According to them, to know a word means to know:
- – its spoken and written form
- – how to recall it if it is needed
- – its primary and secondary meaning
- – its usage
- – collocations of it
- – its pronunciation
- – its register
- – association.

Teachers, however, need to remember that one is not capable of learning all the word functions at a time as vocabulary knowledge is incremental. Thus, what ought to influence the choice of a teacher when a vocabulary test is constructed? According to Komorowska[54], it usually happens that vocabulary is divided into three parts: basic vocabulary, more difficult, rarely appearing vocabulary and problematic, more specific vocabulary. In practice, the last group of words happens to be tested in short quizzes or tests where the knowledge from one or two units is recapitulated. Longer tests commonly check basic vocabulary.

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[50] A. Hughes, *Testing for Language...,* s. 141.

[51] Ibidem, s. 146.

[52] I. S. P. Nation, *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language,* Cambridge 2005, s. 23.

[53] H. Komorowska, *Sprawdzanie umiejętności w nauce...,* s. 62.

[54] Ibidem, s. 63.

Listening

It cannot be stated that people live to listen, speak, write or read. However, these four skills are essential to exist and communicate. Every child informs the world of his or her coming with a cry. Nevertheless, they do not say a word, they cannot read or write, but start their existence with listening. It is undoubtedly the first way to function in the life of an ordinary being.

A whole range of listening tests have been constructed till now to check whether a hearer understands what is presented to him or her. Thus, it is not difficult to surmise that testing listening comprehension, just as a great number of matters in life, has undergone a mass of changes. Many years ago, the primary aim of a listening test was to assess whether students distinguished phonemes, stress or intonation. Actually, that seems to be useful, however, only to some extent as it does not present individual's understanding of the meaning. Furthermore, even if one uses a proper word with a slightly different pronunciation or stress, they can be understood not only by native speakers but also by other speakers of a foreign language as the hearer usually receives what he or she is expecting to. That is why nowadays, according to Komorowska[55], such things as understanding and identifying the main meaning, understanding details, identifying the message or ability to determine the text or a variety of a language are also tested.

Speaking

It is widely realised that oral production is one of the most valuable skills as, according to Fulcher[56], „Speaking is the verbal use of language to communicate with others". The aim of a great majority of courses is to teach how to communicate in a foreign language. However, according to Lado[57], „testing the ability to speak a foreign language is perhaps the least developed and the least practiced in the language testing field". Why are teachers so reluctant to check speaking a second language? Following Komorowska[58], the main dilemma is whether testing oral production should be something more than a simple sum of tasks concerning language elements, that is tasks connected with pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar structures – or maybe it ought to check fluency and effectiveness of passing information and its logical structure.

Another issue associated with speaking is subjectivity. It is common knowledge that testing oral abilities can be subjective and it is somewhat difficult to elaborate a grading scale. Komorowska[59], however, demonstrates two ways of

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55   Ibidem, s. 92-93.
56   G. Fulcher, *Testing Second Language Speaking,* Harlow 2003, s. 23.
57   R. Lado, *Language Testing...,* s. 239.
58   H. Komorowska, *Sprawdzanie umiejętności w nauce...,* s. 117.
59   Ibidem, s. 110.

testing oral skills. The first one is a holistic approach based on a global impression where the whole speech can be evaluated with a mark, a pool of points or a response may be assigned to a certain level of abilities. The second one, an analytic approach, happens when the statement is evaluated according to a few criteria on different scales (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and fluency) and the general result is a sum of allotted points. The author mentions, however, that the ways of pointing component abilities, even with carefully elaborated instructions, may be still subjective.

Notwithstanding, Komorowska[60] asserts that testing communicative competence is of great value as it puts a premium on a fact that not only correctness is checked but also communication occurs.

Reading

People read for various reasons. That is why their attitude to reading may vary. According to Alderson[61], it often turns out that if one needs to obtain a general piece of information, no attention has to be paid to details. However, when the main purpose is to acquire key information, the reader needs to read the text in an utterly different way. The same may occur while reading for pleasure or to pass a test.

Following Alderson[62], it is crucial to choose such a text which relates to students' leisure pastimes or academic background, appeals to them and relates to their intellectual level.

Then, according to Hughes[63], operations such as skimming (for the gist), scanning (for specific information), identifying examples (to support arguments), guessing the meaning of unknown words or recognising indicators (introduction, main body and conclusion) ought to be selected. Moreover, types of texts and topics need to be chosen.

Another issue pointed out by Hughes[64] is the length of a text. The author maintains that about 2000-word text or passage is sufficient for scanning tasks. A few sentences may be enough for detailed reading.

Following Hughes[65], focusing on cultural factors or testing general knowledge of candidates should not appear in a test. According to him[66], it is not good

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[60] Ibidem, s. 119.
[61] C. J. Alderson, *Assessing Reading,* Cambridge 2000, s. 50-51.
[62] Ibidem, s. 29.
[63] A. Hughes, *Testing for Language...,* s. 116-117.
[64] Ibidem, s. 118.
[65] Ibidem, s. 120.
[66] Ibidem.

to test something a student loves or hates, something which is not connected with the subject of a test.

Writing

Writing is not acknowledged as a basic language function. There is a number of those who cannot acquire this ability throughout their whole life. That is probably why it was considered as a domain of wealthy and well-educated in the past. Nowadays, the ability is perceived to be immensely useful worldwide. However, it deserves special attention in school.

Komorowska[67] clarifies that in writing tests the following component abilities can be distinguished and evaluated:

– active vocabulary knowledge
– appropriateness of the language to context.
– cohesion
– competence in proper spelling and punctuation
– organization
– relevance and adequacy of content
– the use of grammar structures.

As far as scoring is concerned, it may be perceived that a few complications may appear. It is a fact that especially free compositions may lead to subjective marking as it was with speaking tests. That is why, according to Komorowska[68], in the case of writing there are also holistic and analytic approaches applied. The author clarifies that intermediate students undergo the following criteria:

– comprehensibility of the text
– grammar structures wealth and correctness
– lexical wealth
– spelling
– the structure/ arrangements.

Advanced students need to fulfill such criteria:

– coherence
– cohesion
– introduction, main body and conclusion
– proper style
– the degree
– of elaborating the topic.

Each criterion is subjected to separate scoring.

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67 H. Komorowska, *Sprawdzanie umiejętności w nauce...*, s. 133.
68 Ibidem, s. 140.

The problem with scoring written production probably leads to the fact that testing writing happens to be neglected especially in primary and junior secondary schools. The aim of each teacher is to have a good impact on students' progress and it should be remembered that when learners are taught writing, they obtain immense awareness of various ideas.

Integrated skills

It rarely occurs that a test checks one skill only. In everyday situations it hardly happens that one is only perceived as a reader/ speaker/ hearer or writer. As can be observed, listening stimulates speaking or writing. Writing also activates speaking but may provoke writing either. It quite often occurs that reading is used to stimulate writing but it can also arouse speaking. This in turn may provoke listening, writing and certainly speaking. Writing, listening and speaking may stimulate reading. As it can be realised, each skill often evokes the appearance of another skill.

Komorowska[69] implies that it is essential to administer individual skill tests every 2–3 weeks after an integrated test. It will allow to spot the strengths and weaknesses of students. Moreover, regular short quizzes would be advantageous to motivate students to work systematically.

Some important advice

As it can be seen, testing is really crucial and a great number of conditions should be satisfied to construct a reliable test. Komorowska[70] does not hesitate to criticize openly the orders commonly met in tests. Instead of using natural forms which can be heard in everyday situations, teachers often use commands such as: „Form a negative sentence!" or „Form a question!". According to Komorowska[71], the same purpose may be achieved with a statement: „There are two completely different brothers. What one does, the second doesn't do. If we know a lot about the first one, we shall know a lot about the second. Look at the sentences about the first brother and say what you know about the second one". When a task is formulated in such a way, students can see the purpose of their work. They start to be convinced that instead of grammar forms they use „natural language".

The selection of techniques depends on both the age and skills of a testee. If the aim of a test is to check one's competence in listening, no influence on marks should have grammar or spelling.

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69   Ibidem, s. 154.
70   Ibidem, s. 84-86.
71   Ibidem, s. 85.

It is crucial to teach students how to cope with tests. Some useful tips for those who are afraid of school tests can be established. At first, examinees ought to appear on time as being late can lead to a feeling of anxiety. Then, to avoid mistakes all the instructions should be read carefully. Furthermore, one should be convinced that he/she understands the questions. What is more, it is good to start the test with what one knows. It is no use wasting time on those parts which are not remembered. Moreover, it does not seem to be good to hurry. However, one should have a possibility to look at the clock to check how much time is left. Furthermore, the testee ought to stay positive and sit in a way which does not tense the muscles. Finally, all the given time ought to be used. If there is some time left, the answers may be checked once again.

Conclusion

Life nowadays is not possible without a good command of a nonnative language, especially English. It can be perceived worldwide that no relations or achievements can appear unless one can communicate with foreigners.

The aim of the article was to show that testing is one of the most useful tools in both acquiring new knowledge and strengthening it. When it is known what frightens students, how to construct a good reliable and valid test, how to „take care" of students and testers, no problems should appear with achieving better results and scores. Moreover, it must be remembered that it is not possible for a teacher to evaluate one's knowledge after one or two marks only. A small number of tests usually gives a false impression. Those students who are tested more frequently get new lore and knowledge. Moreover, they can show their real abilities and achieve their goals.

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