LANGUAGE
English as a foreign language

TARGET AND LEVEL
Primary School, Secondary School I and II, A1 - A2

AIMS
› Think about how testing and teaching are seamless;
› Apply Bloom's Taxonomy to test development.

Didattica

OLDIES BUT GOODIES: BLOOM'S TAXONOMY AS A GUIDE FOR TEACHER-MADE TESTS

La taxonomie de Bloom peut être utilisée pour de multiples objectifs dans le cadre de la formation initiale des enseignants. Cette contribution propose un exercice d'utilisation de la taxonomie de Bloom pour créer un test, à travers lequel les futurs enseignants réfléchissent à l'adaptation de matériel pré-existant. Cet exercice permet non seulement de penser l'évaluation mais également de considérer l'organisation des savoirs à différents niveaux.

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Introduction

Bloom's taxonomy (1956) is a helpful tool for teachers to ask different questions, to get away from the mere "comprehension" element of teaching language and to provide another angle of analyzing planning. There have also been many other models over the years such as the reworked Bloom's (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), Marzano's New Taxonomy (2000) the SOLO (structure of observed learning outcomes, Biggs & Collis, 1982), Socratic questioning and a good overview can be found in O'Neill & Murphy (2010). The challenge was given to the students at the Schaffhausen University of Teacher Education to apply Bloom's taxonomy to the creation of a test. This exercise was done within one 45-minute lecture and was meant as a thinking exercise in an attempt to get away from vocabulary translation tests, an extremely singular way of assessing language, to thinking about what it means to know words and what it means to test language skills meaningfully and encourage thought. At a later point in the course, students thought more about features of language

to be tested such as gist and inference for listening and reading, and mechanics, accuracy and range of writing (to name a few examples of subskills and constructs). The following examples of a pre-service teacher-developed test are based on the Anderson & Krathwohl (2001) revised version of Bloom's taxonomy for primary school learners using the First Choice series Senses (Littlejohn & Schofield, 2004) books towards the end of their first year of formal English language instruction.

Each example begins with the larger category of the respective cognitive process followed by the exact text from Anderson & Krathwohl (2001: Appendix 5.1). The concrete ideas listed below the category are first based on the primary level, but the tasks can certainly be used at the secondary or higher levels of language proficiency.

Practical ideas

Category 1: Remember — "Retrieve relevant knowledge from long-term memory"
Category 2: Understand — "Construct meaning from instructional messages, including oral, written, and graphic communication."

> Bloom's lends itself to a relative expedient understanding of some categories of thinking skills and is a good support for beginning teachers.

Our thinking of the differences between remembering and understanding in the language classroom were that remembering was arbitrarily knowing words but not necessarily what they mean, and understanding would be using them in appropriate contexts. The other thought was that perhaps *remembering* is more receptive understanding and thus *understanding* would be related to production. With this in mind, for remembering, students came up with the following activities and discussions entailed about which cognitive domain they represented.

Learners can simply match words from the unit to pictures or definitions. They can also answer true/false questions such as:

> › You touch with your hands.
> › You smell with your hands.

Learners can label a picture where people are doing things with their senses (smelling roses; petting a dog) or be prompted to say or what a specific person is doing. Students also came up with a quick dialogue (Figure 1) where learners can identify who likes what.

Another activity is to have learners describe various objects that were NOT in the book (Figure 2), but with the language that was taught in the book. Here only content and spelling are assessed, but the idea could be used for the creation of a riddle activity.

Figure 1: Dialogue

Listen to the two children talking together. Decide how they feel about the different objects. If they like it, put a smiley ☺. If they don't like it, put a frown ☹. Complete the chart. The first one is done for you.

Sarah (S): I really like oranges!
John (J): Me, too, they taste really good!
S: Do you like cats, John?
J: No, they're horrible!
S: I think they're nice! I like to smell them, but dogs, on the other hand, smell bad.
J: I think they are nice. If you wash them, they smell good. Now listen to the music. What do you think about it?
S: It's horrible.
J: Oh, yes, that's true! Let's see, what's next: Coffee – what do you think?
S: Uggh, it's too hot! What do you think?
J: It's not too hot – and it smells good! What's last on our list – the flowers – oh, they smell great!
S: Ahhcchoo: They're horrible! They make me sneeze! Better get plastic ones next time!

	Object	Sarah	John
1.	oranges		
2.	cats		
3.	dogs		
4.	the music		
5.	coffee		
6.	flowers		

Figure 2: Describing novel objects

Object	What is it? It's a(n)…	Shape It's…	Color It's…	Texture It's…	Flavor It's…
	orange	round	orange	rough	tangy
	cereal box		colorful		
	cookie		.		

Reading comprehension with short answer questions for a text similar to one in the textbooks (Where does the light go? What does your brain do in the dark? Figure 3) is also a viable option.
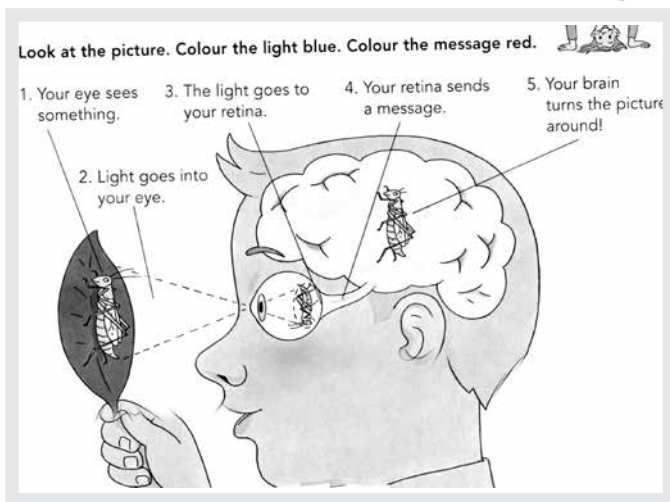

Figure 3. Senses Topic Book reading text p. 9.

Figure 4. Senses Activity Book, p. 17, taste-testing.

Category 3: Apply - "Carry out or use a procedure in a given situation."

The simplest form of assessment with Senses that would show application would be to let the learners first do an experiment in class as part of the learning process (Figure 4). Then, give them the task of modelling this experiment orally with a partner for you at a later date. This would entail them learning / writing a role play such as:

A: Close your eyes and hold your nose! I am going to give you something to eat.
B: Okay! I'm ready.
A: Good, here we go. What is it?
B: I don't know! It's chewy. Is it gum?
A: Yes! But which flavor?
B: Oh, I don't know!

This would recycle language used previously and classroom language ("I don't know", "I'm ready") and allow the learners to take a context they are familiar with to apply their new language skills. Although normally with applying new knowledge, learners should be put in a novel situation, in Senses the learners are not required to say anything other than the name of the food. Like this, they are now producing the activity instead of passively doing it. Other ideas would be to let them do another experiment of their own choice that has to do with senses (such as coloring food and seeing if, for example, an orange tastes as good if it's been dyed black).

Finally, an open prompt such as "Look out your classroom window. What information do your senses give you?" would be an exercise in application.
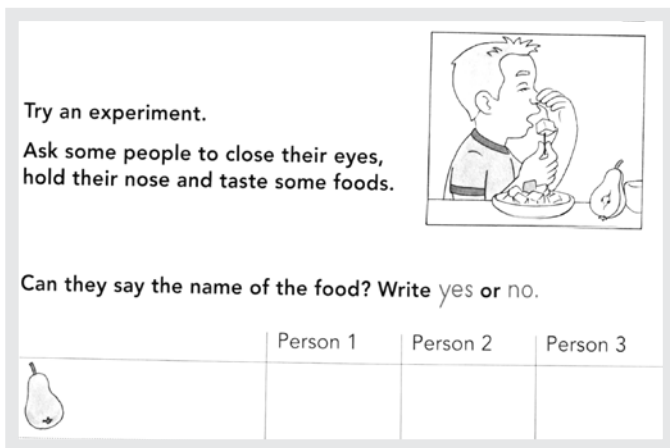
Category 4: Analyze – "Break material into its constituent parts and determine how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose."

A simple way of getting learners to analyze the senses would be through the following prompts:

> *Look around your classroom. What can you see, hear, touch, smell and taste? What can you see and touch? What can you smell and see? Write at least 5 sentences!*
> *List things you see, hear, smell, taste, feel that "make" a certain season / holiday (such as winter).*

A Venn diagram or a table of some sort can help to organize this activity for learners, and thus allow the teacher to only focus on correct content and the spelling of the written words.

Learners could also be provided a text from which they are asked to classify words into various "senses" categories, such as "It's a sunny day! The sun is shining and my face is hot!" They might put "sense of sight: sunny, sun, shining, face" and "sense of touch: hot".

With the dialogue in Figure 1, learners can also be asked to sort the adjectives used into categories (positive and negative, for example) and also to describe how intonation might help know if someone likes something or not.

Category 5: Evaluate – "Make judgements based on criteria or standards"

In Figure 5, learners are asked circle the people having fun based on color-coding for the senses (such as blue for touch in "The baby is touching the flower"). This could be expanded on a test if learners had to circle who was having fun and who was

Figure 5. Senses Activity Book, p. 22.

not having fun and why. As a reading/ listening comprehension activity, it could be true/false or locating the appropriate person, e.g. "The boy is not having fun because he cannot see. He is not smiling". Learners can also be provided a short text such as "Sarah likes sweet things such as ice cream, hamburgers, cookies and chocolate" and asked to identify what does not fit.

Category 6: Create – "Put elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganize elements into a new pattern or structure"

Learners have already done the story-based listening activity (Figure 6) and are at the end of the book. They can now be given the pictures, out of order and cut up, and be asked to tell / write a new story (making sure they are using language from the entire unit, not just this exercise) with the pictures in any order they would like and an any context.

In the unit "My eyes" the following words/expressions were found: *pupil / choose / light / neighbor / some / can / helps.*

Pupils can choose to work with their *neighbors* and *help* each other create *some* new sentences in a different context than "my eyes" in *light* of the newly acquired vocabulary.

Finally, learners can write their own dialogues and perform them, as in Figure 1.

Concluding words

In retrospect, it may have been better to use Marzano's New Taxonomy (Marzano & Kendall, 2008) as the terminology and breakdowns are perhaps slightly more familiar to Swiss teachers. However, Bloom's lends itself to a relative expedient understanding of some categories of thinking skills and is a good support for beginning teachers. It must also be said, however, that many of the processes we want the learners to be going through cannot be verbalized with limited language skills. For example, if we are teaching young learners the differences

between rabbits and hares, then we will most certainly show them pictures. On a language level, we may provide a Venn diagram where individual words (long ears) can be written in. However, verbalizing the Venn diagram for a young learner might be "Hares have long ears" which is a description, and shows understanding, but the cognitive process going on is most likely analysis. Thus, the context of the topic and the visual prompts that promote thinking are hopefully much deeper than the language that can be produced. This is thus the idea behind content-based language teaching and testing.
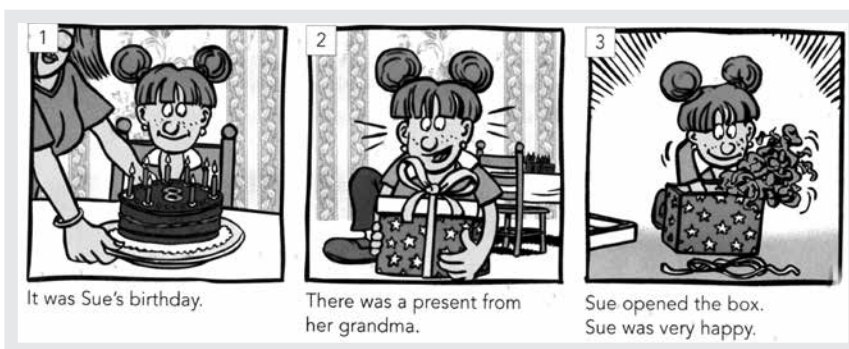

It was Sue's birthday.

There was a present from her grandma.

Sue opened the box. Sue was very happy.

Figure 6. Senses Topic Book, p. 22 – Picture story.

References

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Useful Links

Hedstrom, B. (2010). *The new Bloom's taxonomy & foreign language instruction.* Available at: www.brycehedstrom.com

SOLO taxonomy: https://taitcoles.wordpress.com/2011/1%7/solo-taxonomy/

http://edu.blogs.com/edublogs/2012/08/solo-taxonomy-giving-students-a-sense-of-progress-in-learning.html