

TESTING IN TEACHING a FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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The present paper attempts to investigate various types of tests and their application in the language classroom. The theoretical part deals with the basic data about testing, the comparison of such issues as reasons for testing, types of tests, such as diagnostic, progress, achievement, placement and proficiency tests.

The age of rapidly growing information technologies greatly complicates the problems of teaching foreign languages and the formation of new language competencies. Foreign language teachers face a dilemma: how to maximize the process of assimilating a variety of information, as well as effectively and quickly check the amount of acquired knowledge. In this case, testing comes to the aid of the teacher. A test is a special form of work control, the implementation of which makes it possible to judge the level of a student's knowledge by a given amount of material at a given time. Testing, in addition to the control, performs three main and interrelated functions: diagnostic, teaching and educational. However, in the case of computer testing, these functions have their own characteristics. The most obvious function of testing – diagnostic – surpasses all other forms of pedagogical control in objectivity, breadth and speed of revealing the level of knowledge, skills and abilities of students. The educational function is manifested in the frequency and inevitability of test control, which disciplines, organizes and directs student activities. The teaching function is directly related to the control. In the course of performing control tasks, repetition, consolidation and improvement of knowledge. That is, control testing itself implies feedback.

Hicks [4, p. 155] considers that the role of tests is very useful and important, especially in language learning. It is a means to show both the students and the teacher how much the learners have learnt during a course. Moreover, according to Heaton [3, p. 67], tests could be used to display the strength and weaknesses of the teaching process and help the teacher improve it. They can demonstrate what should be paid more attention to, should be worked on and practised. Furthermore, as Alderson [2, p.25] assumes, we should not forget that the tests when administered receive less support from the teacher as it is usually during the exercises in a usual language classroom. The students have to cope themselves; they cannot rely on the help of the teacher if they are in doubt. During a usual procedure when doing various activities the students know they can encounter the teacher's help if they require it. They know the teacher is always near and ready to assist, therefore, no one is afraid to make a mistake and try to take a chance to do the exercises. However, when writing a test and being left alone to deal with the test activities, the students panic and forget everything they knew before.

When drawing up test items, the following provisions should be taken into account: questions should be of different difficulty levels; the wording of the questions of the test tasks should contain one complete thought, avoid words that make it possible to guess the correct answer, and ambiguous statements. The answer to the question posed should not depend on the previous answers. Correct and incorrect answers should be unambiguous in content and the total number of words. The place of the correct answer should not be repeated from question to question [1, p.22].

According to some scholars (Thompson, Hughes, Alderson, Heaton, Underhill), there are four traditional categories or types of tests: proficiency tests, achievement tests, diagnostic tests, and placement tests.

Diagnostic test is a test that is meant to display what the student knows and what s/he does not know. Moreover, the test can check the students' knowledge before starting a particular course. The diagnostic test displays the teacher a situation of the students' current knowledge. This is very essential especially when the students return from their summer holidays (that produces a rather substantial gap in their knowledge) or if the students start a new course and the teacher is completely unfamiliar with the level of the group. Hence, the teacher has to consider carefully about the items s/he is interested in to teach.

A placement test is a test that places the students at an appropriate level in a program or a course. This term does not refer to the system and construction of the test, but to its usage purpose. According to Hughes [5, p. 7], this type of test is also used to decide which group or class the learner could be joined to. A placement test is a test that places the students at an appropriate level in a program or a course. This term does not refer to the system and construction of the test, but to its usage purpose. According to Hughes [5, p. 7], this type of test is also used to decide which group or class the learner could be joined to. We can attempt to compare a placement

test and diagnostic one. From the first sight these both types of tests could look similar. They both are given at the beginning of the study year and both are meant for distinguishing the students' level of the current knowledge. a diagnostic test is meant for displaying a picture of the students' general knowledge at the beginning of the study year for the teacher to plan further work and design an appropriate syllabus for his/her students. Whereas, a placement test is designed and given in order to use the information of the students' knowledge for putting the students into groups according to their level of the language.

According to Alderson [2, p.33], progress test will show the teacher whether the students have learnt the recently taught material successfully. Basically, the teacher intends to check certain items, not general topics covered during the school or study year. Commonly, it is not very long and is determined to check the recent material. Therefore, the teacher might expect his/her learners to get rather high scores. The following type is supposed to be used after the students have learnt either a set of units on a theme or have covered a definite topic of the language. It will display the teacher whether the material has been successfully acquired or the students need additional practice instead of starting a new material.

A progress test will basically display the activities based on the material the teacher is determined to check. To evaluate it the teacher can work out a certain system of points that later will compose a mark. Typically, such tests do not influence the students' final mark at the end of the year.

Apart from a progress test the teachers employ another type – achievement test. An achievement test is a test, which measures a language someone has learned during a specific course, study or program. Here the progress is significant and, therefore, is the main point tested. Achievement tests are meant to check the mastery of the material covered by the learners.

Proficiency test is a test, which measures how much of a language a person knows or has learnt. It is not bound to any curriculum or syllabus, but is intended to check the learners' language competence. Although, some preparation and administration were done before taking the test, the test's results are what being focused on. The examples of such tests could be the American Testing of English as Foreign Language test (TOEFL) that is used to measure the learners' general knowledge of English in order to allow them to enter any high educational establishments or to take up a job in the USA. Another proficiency test is Cambridge First Certificate test that has almost the same aim as TOEFL.

The benefits of testing include flexibility; using of various types of tasks; equal conditions and rights for all test takers; the possibility of preliminary testing of options; the creative nature of the preparation of tests, stimulating the preparation of the teacher; systematization of knowledge and skills of students [1, p.23].

To summarize we can claim that there are different types of tests that serve for different purposes. Moreover, they all are necessary for the teacher's work, for them, apart from a proficiency test, could contribute to successful material acquisition by learners.

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