



### ASSESSING RECEPTIVE SKILLS

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#### Article Info

##### Article history:

Published June 25, 2022

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##### Keywords:

**assessment, receptive skill, listening, reading**

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#### ABSTRACT

*Teaching and assessment are interrelated each other. They are important elements of learning cycle. As teachers, we must evaluate on a routine basis so that we can make decisions about what to teach the next day. English skill is classified into receptive and productive skills. Receptive skills that include listening and writing. They are crucial to be tested as language competence is developed firstly from receptive skills. When people understand what other people say or write, interaction may go on. If an interlocutor does not know the utterances, communication will not occur. This article explores the nature of receptive skills and provides the models of testing both listening and reading skills and its implementation. By understanding the concept of assessing receptive skill, hopefully teachers are able to run the assessment more effectively that later can contribute to the better learning.*

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#### How to Cite:

Nuraeningsih. (2022). *Assessing Receptive Skills*. Journal of Applied Linguistics Indonesia (Aplinesia). 6 (1), 49-56.

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## **1. Introduction**

As language is a medium of communication, the objective of foreign language learning is to be able to use the language in communication, both in spoken and written. Language skills are divided into four, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Those four skills are then classified into productive and receptive skills. Productive skills consist of speaking and writing, while receptive skills include reading and listening. The ability to comprehend a language is known as receptive abilities. Further Nurgiyantoro (2016) states that receptive skill is the ability to receive, decode what is uttered by a speaker or what is written by a writer. "The first stage of responding to a communicating event is listening. Listening is a continuous process of receiving sound and deciphering its meaning. It opens up the possibility of further interaction." (Lakshminarayanan & T, 2008). Communication skill is developed firstly from receptive skills. When people understand what other people say or write, interaction may go on. If an interlocutor does not know the utterances, communication will not occur. Therefore, it is very crucial to develop receptive skills to English Foreign Language (EFL) students because through receptive language, they are exposed to English texts that are meaningful as language input.

Listening and reading have similarities. They receive and positively understand the message which is delivered by speakers or writers. The difference lies on the device used, namely the voice and writing style. Both the tone system and the writing system are basically just symbols, or linguistic symbols, and they are arbitrary symbols which is used to convey information from one speaker to another.

### **The importance of assessing receptive skills**

Teaching and assessment are interrelated each other. They are important elements of learning cycle. As teachers, we must evaluate on a routine basis so that we can make decisions about what to teach the next day. We may be quite unpleasantly surprised if we simply teach the entire unit and wait until the final test and find out what the learners have mastered. However, if we are testing on a daily basis all across the unit, teachers do not need to sum all of the assessments gathered at a final assessment. Instead, we may make that assessment based on the most current assessments. As a result, we do not blame the student who did not understand much at the start of the unit and worked extremely hard to master what you considered to be the most important concepts. Instead, we grade them based on where they are at the end of the unit. When the evaluation is made, this produces a more objective review or assessment of where they are performing.

Language assessment is conducted for several purpose. First, the obtained data of general or specialized language abilities from task performance can be used to make predictions about an individual's usage of those abilities in real-world situations (Mcnamara, 2001). Students' achievement may describe their abilities that have been practiced in their daily life. Further Nurgiyantoro (2016) explained that language assessment provides information for considering and decision making. The information here refers to students' knowledge, skill, performance and achievement that are attained during the teaching and learning process. In addition, the result of assessment functions to provide feedback for teachers of what they did in language instruction, to analyze the strength and weaknesses that should be considered to get the solution for improving the affectivity of the learning process they carry out.

### **Assessing listening skill**

As stated above that receptive skills involve listening and reading. Listening abilities are a subset of language skills that include capturing, understanding, studying, evaluating, and creating the facts or messages communicated by speakers. Reading skills, like listening skills, are components of the language abilities of capturing, understanding, examining, evaluating, and

creating the content of information or messages provided by writers using written language. Furthermore, the learning achievement formulation of the content or learning resources for receptive linguistic skills, which consists and components of listening and reading abilities, is included in the design of the course achievements (Ariyanti, 2020). Even pupils who have a limited command of the English language can demonstrate their comprehension of the material without using words. Students can, for example, watch everyday classroom procedures and demonstrate their understanding of the routines by participating in them. Both instructors and learners in the early stages of language proficiency can benefit from this bodily kinesthetic show of comprehension. This is the simplest way of receptive skill testing by identifying students' body language when we teach them.

Brown (2001) identified the listening performance types consisting of:

1. Receptive. It is listening for perception of a greater stretch of language's components (phonemes, vocabulary, intonation, discourse markers, and so on).
2. Responsive. To make a similarly short response, students must listen to a comparatively short stretch of text (a salutation, question, instruction, comprehension check, etc.).
3. Selective. It means processing long lengths of speech, such as short monologues, in order to "scan" for specific information. The goal of such a performance is to be able to fully understand specific information in the context of a larger stretch of spoken speech (for example, classroom instructions from a teacher, Television or radio news headlines, or narratives), or specific facts and occurrences.
4. Extensive. To gain a top-down, worldwide comprehension of spoken language, listen. Listening to class lecture to listening to a discussion and deducing a thorough message or purpose are all examples of extensive performance. Extensive hearing includes listening for the gist, the major idea, and making inferences.

Listening ability test is the ability of test takers to understand the content of discourse that is communicated orally directly by the speaker, or just an audio or video recording. This understanding can refer to a general understanding such as the topic discussed or an outline in its content or more detailed sections including actors, location, time, and some salient aspects. Understanding through listening can also be related to things that are more profound in nature, which are not limited to things that are very firm and immediately revealed. This kind of understanding can only be obtained by connecting certain parts of the discourse or drawing conclusions and implications based on understanding the parts of the discourse. All of that is a description of what one should understand when listening to a discourse that is communicated orally to be listened to.

To do listening test, Brown (2004) divides the skills into micro and macro skills of listening. Micro skill deals with identifying smaller elements of language and macro skill is the skill focusing larger language elements. The microskills are as follows:

1. Discriminate among the distinctive sounds of English
2. Retain chunks of language of different length in short-term memory
3. Recognize English stress patterns, words in stressed and unstressed positions, rhythmic structure, intonation contours, and their role in signaling information.
4. Recognize reduced forms of words.
5. Distinguish word boundaries, recognize a core of words and interpret word order patterns and their significance.
6. Process speech at different rates of delivery.
7. Process speech containing pauses, errors, corrections, and other performance variables.
8. Recognize grammatical word classes, patterns, rules and elliptical forms.
9. Detect sentence constituents and distinguish between major and minor constituents.
10. Recognize that a particular meaning may be expressed in different grammatical form.
11. Recognize cohesive devices in spoken discourse.

The following is the macroskills:

1. Recognize the communicative functions of utterances, according to situations, participants, goals.
2. Infer situations, participants, goals using real-world knowledge.
3. From events, ideas, and so on, described, predict outcomes, infer links and relations as main idea, supporting idea, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification.
4. Distinguish between literal and implied meaning.
5. Use facial, kinesic, body language, and other nonverbal clues to decipher meanings.
6. Develop and use a battery of listening strategies, such as detecting keywords, guessing the meaning of words from context, appealing for help, and signaling comprehension or lack thereof.

(Brown, 2004).

According to Djiwandono (2008), the determination of the type of the target ability as the focus of the test is adjusted to the level of ability of the test taker. For the beginner level, test items can be used whose answers require only an understanding of things that are directly, concretely and literally contained in the discourse. Questions that are less naturally directive, including the connection between various parts of the discourse, finding implications and drawing conclusions, determining attitudes and evaluating the content of the discourse, are more suitable for test takers with higher language proficiency levels.

To design a listening test, there are several considerations to take into account before. They are discourse difficulty level and content & scope of discourse (Nurgiyantoro, 2016). Discourse difficulty level here means the complexity of word choice and grammatical structure used in a text.

As the name implies, listening test, the test material being tested is delivered orally and received by students through hearing facilities. According to Nurgiyantoro (2016) listening assessment can be done in various ways, as described below.

a. Memory level

Listening test at the memory level to remember facts or recall facts contained in the discourse that is heard, can be in the form of names, events, numbers, and years. The test can be in the form of a short-term or multiple-choice objective test.

b. Understanding level

Tests at the level of understanding require students to understand the discourse that is heard. The ability to understand the question, which may refer to the content of the discourse, the relationship between ideas, between factors, between events, and cause and effect relationships. However, the ability to understand at the level of understanding (C 2) is not yet complex, it does not require high-level cognitive work. So, understanding level is easy level. In other words, the test items of this level are not yet difficult.

c. Application level

Listening test that can be categorized as application level tests are test items consisting of statements (which is heard) and pictures as the options listed in the worksheet.

d. Analysis Level

At the level of analysis, students are required to do analysis to understand the information or message by choosing the right answer. Without conducting a discourse analysis, the correct answer cannot be determined. Thus, the item analysis level test is more complex and difficult than the test item of the comprehension level. The analysis is carried out in the form of detailed analysis of information, considering certain linguistic forms and aspects, finding logical relationships, cause and effect, situational relationships, and so on.

## 2. Models of assessing listening skills

To design a listening test, a teacher firstly must determine the objective. Next, s/he starts designing the tasks and the last is administering the test. According to Brown (2004), there are some test models to assess listening skill. They are as follows:

1. Recognizing phonological and morphological elements. This kind of test acquires students to recognize sounds and spelling of words, for example:

Students hear : It's a bed.

Students read : a. It's a bed

b. It's a bet

2. Paraphrase recognition. In this kind of test, students infer the information based on what they heard. For example:

Students hear : Hi, I am Ahmad. I come from Iran.

Students read : a. Ahmad is from Iran.

b. Ahmad loves Iran

c. Ahmad wants to visit Iran

d. Ahmad works in Iran

3. Question and answer. This kind of listening test is very familiar since it frequently appears in other language skill tests. The students must be able to answer the questions as they find in other language skills. Here is the example:

Students hear : How often do read books in a week?

Students read : a. very often

b. for hours

c, about 2 hours.

d. No, I didn't

4. Listening cloze. This task asks students to listen to a recording and simultaneously read the written text where the selected words or phrases are identified. Look at the example below.

Students hear:

Ladies and gentlemen, I now have some connecting gate information for these of you making connections to other flights out of San Francisco.

Flight seven-oh-six to Portland will depart from gate seventy-three at nine-thirty P.M.

Flight ten-forty-five to Reno will depart at nine-fifty P.M from gate seventeen.

Flight four-forty to Monterey will depart at nine-thirty-five P.M. from gate sixty.

(Brown, 2004)

Students fill in the blanks using the words they hear.

5. Information transfer. This task requires students to give meaning to a visual such as diagram, pictures, or map direction.
6. Sentence repetition. In this task, a teacher repeats some sentences or some parts of the sentence. Since this task has ambiguous role whether testing listening or speaking, before using this testing model, teachers should explain clearly to the students the rules and procedure of using this model.
7. Dictation. It is most typical listening test. A teacher reads a text repeatedly then the students write down the sentences they hear. Although it has been used for ages, the difficulty in using this model is the word length manipulation.
8. Communicative stimulus-response. This task is similar to question and answer model. The difference posits on the existence of stimulus given by the teacher.

### 3. Assessing reading skill

Reading is commonly defined as the ability to deduce meaning from text. The processes of understanding define a reader's ability to utilize methods or strategies to aid comprehension of written content, while the final outcome or evaluation of an audience's ability to interpret what has been read is determined by the products of knowledge (Fontenot, 2019). Reading ability is a critical competence to gain in foreign language or second language instruction since it serves as a language input that enriches students' knowledge and allows them to use it in productive skills such as uttering utterances or composing sentences. The ability to discern meaning from text is often defined as reading. The ability of a reader to use methods or tactics to improve comprehension of written content is defined by the processes of understanding, but the end conclusion or evaluation of a public's ability to analyze what has been read is judged by the objects of knowledge (Fontenot, 2019). Reading ability is an important skill to develop in different language or second language training since it acts as a language input that increases students' knowledge and helps them to apply it in productive activities like uttering utterances or creating sentences.

Reading has several model of test that teachers can do. (Brown, 2004) divided the task performance into four categories.

1. Perceptive. It is similar to receptive in listening task. It involves identification of letters, words, punctuation, and other morphological symbols. In this task, bottom up reading process is implemented.
2. Selective. This type is very commonly found in reading task. Certain typical exercises are used to assess one's reading identification of vocabulary, grammatical, or conversational characteristics of text within a relatively brief stretch of language by using pictures, matching, true/false, multiple - choice questions, and so on. Sentences, short paragraphs, and simple graphs and charts are examples of the stimuli that a test designer may choose. Short answers are also expected. It's possible to use a combination of bottom-up and top-down processing.
3. Interactive. Different from the two previous reading tasks, this type uses interactive reading process. It means that there must be interaction between the reader and the text. That is, reading is a negotiation of meaning: the reader comes with a number of schemata to the text in order to comprehend it, and intake is the result of the interaction. Anecdotes, short stories and descriptions, excerpts from literary texts, questionnaires, memoranda, announcements, directions, recipes, and the like are examples of genres that lend themselves to interactive reading. The goal of an interactive task is to find relevant elements (lexical, symbolic, grammatical, and conversational) within somewhat brief texts in order to retain the information being processed.
4. Extensive. Extensive reading means reading longer text such as academic articles, essays, narratives and books. The objective of this type of reading task is to get texts' global understanding, not on smaller linguistic elements such as words or phonemes. It usually implements top-down reading process.

#### Designing reading test

Since the purpose of reading is the ability to understand the information found in a text, a reading test is conducted to measure students' competence in understanding the content of a text. Therefore, a test designer should present a text that contains information that demands students to comprehend the text. There are some points to consider in designing reading test, e.i. level of difficulty, text length, content of text and text type or genre (Nurgiyantoro, 2016).

- a. Level of difficulty

Level of difficulty of a text is generally determined by the lexical and grammatical complexity that a text has. The more complex the vocabulary and the grammatical structure lied in a text, the more difficult the text is. Another indicator is the number of words that is used. A complex text uses more vocabularies. Therefore, a teacher should think about the appropriate text to test reading. It should be achievable, but not too easy.

b. Text length

A long text psychologically will affect students' anxiety in doing a reading test. They prefer a short text that takes shorter time to do. Consequently, teachers should consider the text length in designing a reading test to have effective assessment.

c. Content of text

Reading can widen students' horizon. By reading a lot of varied texts, they get more knowledge and information about anything in this world. It is the challenge of teachers to provide any text that satisfies students' need and interest. In choosing the text, teachers should make sure that the content is valid and not controversial. Texts that violate issues of race, religion, gender, or politics should not be used. Remember that education aims at teaching truth and positive attitude that should be highlighted in daily classes.

d. Text type

In curriculum of English education of each level, it has been stated the text type that students should acquire. The basic genre such as narrative, recount, descriptive, report, procedure, exposition, explanation, news item, and spoof are spread from seventh grade to twelve grade. Therefore, in selecting the text type, a teacher should consult to the syllabus first before constructing the test.

### Models of reading test

There are some models of reading test that can be chosen. Nurgiyantoro (2016) classified the model into two types, namely choosing written response, and constructing response.

a. Choosing response reading test

This type of text requires students to identify, choose or respond to the available choice, as categorized as objective test, such as multiple choice, matching, true-false, or other traditional test. For example:

The word "they" in paragraph 2 line 9 refers to ....

- a. students
- b. teachers
- c. friends
- d. parents

b. Constructing response reading test

In this test type, students are supposed to construct the answer by themselves. Constructing response means that the test takers construct the answers based on their understanding of the message. For example, it is carried out in open-ended questions or the task of retelling the information contained in the text. This test type belongs to authentic assessment that requires students to perform a certain task as the test objective. It does not only involve receptive skills but also productive one. Nurgiyantoro (2016) classified this test into several tasks such as open-ended questions, retelling, making summary, synopsis, and review.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper has explored the nature of receptive skills, the importance of conducting receptive skill assessment and some model of testing receptive skills. It is very important for teachers to design appropriate tests that will be used to measure their students' receptive skills. In constructing the test, they have to make sure that the test matches with the learning objectives.

Therefore, peer judgment and colleague collaboration may become a good way to provide review and constructive criticism to make a meaningful test.

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