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Impact of Communicative Language Test Assessments in Enhancing Learners' Capacity

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A B S T R A C T S

The use of communicative assessments to evaluate language learners' capacity to use the target language in real-world contexts has gained more attention and has been the subject of research in tandem with the communicative language teaching approach. Test designers should keep fundamental ideas and traits in mind when creating tests with this objective. This paper also addresses the issue of whether or not communicative test designers can provide an appropriate estimation of test takers' language skills based on the scores. Some literature reviews indicate that the use of communicative language testing may provide difficulties for test developers, and this topic is covered in the paper. Most language examinations have historically been designed to evaluate a person's language knowledge, including vocabulary and grammar. The discipline of language testing had started to concentrate on creating communicative language testing assignments by the middle of the 1980s. This indicates that the demand for communicative language exams has been acknowledged, and a lot of studies have been conducted on communicative language tests since then. By conducting this literature study, it is believed that the principles and features of communicative test design and elements other than communicative language proficiency that affect test scores and communication testing obstacles can be explored.

A R T I C L E   I N F O

1. INTRODUCTION

Tests of communicative language are used to gauge a language learner's capacity to engage in conversation or utilize language in everyday contexts. Based on communicative ability, communicative tests are created, which cover the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. linguistic competence (knowledge of linguistic forms), sociolinguistic competence (the capacity to use language effectively in circumstances), discourse competence (coherence and cohesiveness), and strategic competence, according to Canale and Swain (1980). (knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communicative strategies). The development of communicative language tests, which includes defining test goals and taking into account how the exam will affect teaching and learning, requires an understanding of the model of communicative competence (Medani & Sakti, 2022; Haristiani & Rifa'I, 2020). Four principles of communicative test design have been devised by a team at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) based on the paradigm of communicative competence (Bailey & Brown, 1999). "Start from somewhere" is the initial guiding guideline. The research of Katsumasa (1997) and Wesche (1983) supported this assertion by demonstrating that test designers should carefully state what they anticipate test-takers to do when they use the target language in a particular context. This means that test writers must be aware of the objectives of the test.

After that, test creators can create scales and criteria for evaluation processes to precisely quantify the indicated aspects of testee performance. To demonstrate this principle, Bailey and Brown (1999) gave an example: If the tester concentrates on gauging the test-taker's capacity to convey meaning, accuracy will not be included in the scoring criteria. This is true even though conveying and capturing meaning while maintaining accuracy are two important elements in communication. As a result, it is unfair to students if test authors consider other implicit aims while evaluating exams, which also has a detrimental impact on the test's validity. The second guideline for creating a communicative language exam is "Concentration on content." This article's content includes both topics and actions that will be taken. Age, competence level, interests, and goals/needs of students or test-takers are taken into account while selecting appropriate content. Stated that "the linguistic tasks we will put our learners in our assessments will help us with the tasks we would set them in their future employment (Carroll, 1983; Tamara *et al*., 2021). "In other words, tasks ought to be created by the testee's pertinent needs. For instance, duties for kids after primary school can involve greeting people and reading traffic signs like "Danger," "No Entry," and other such signs.

The tasks must be genuine and have a direct connection to reality. These exercises are appropriate for kids' ages and skill levels. Students are expected to be able to complete the tasks since what they do corresponds to what society expects of them in real life (at least according to the opinions of seasoned teachers and consultants). "Biased for best" is the third rule of communicative test design. This implies that test developers should keep in mind the need to design a test that can best utilize test taker performance. This test design tenet is further supported by the work of Fairbairn (2005). "Biased for best" is a concept that, in Brown's words, "goes slightly beyond how the student interprets the exam to a degree of strategic participation on the part of student and teacher in preparing for, putting up, and following the test itself," according to Fairbairn (2005). To demonstrate this third principle, Bailey and Bworn (1999) claimed that when she gave a test that required students to take notes, she realized that the text might be above their proficiency level. As a result, she read the text aloud to the students three times and encouraged them to ask for new words that were used in the text.

According to McGroarty (1984), test creators and teachers should give students or test takers the necessary reviews to help them be well-prepared and ready for the test, recommend helpful strategies, and construct the test in such a way that it is moderately challenging to the best students/testees while the weaker will not be overwhelmed (Fairbairn, 2005). The fourth tenet of communicative language testing is working on washback. Test writers should provide precise scoring guidelines that will be made available to both teachers and test takers to get positive washback. To encourage good washback, course objectives and exam material are also taken into account. Wesche (1983) asserts that when developing objectives, it is crucial to make sure.

(i) The discussion will center on subjects and the linguistic skills the student will require.

(ii) The potential impact of context on language use, and

(iii) The appropriate discourse genres and the test takers' degrees of proficiency.

It is easier for test creators to select quality stimulus material that will supply essential language forms, such as structures and vocabulary, when these characteristics are made clear. This not only encourages positive washback. The OISE team's developed principles are not original. Similar ideas were covered in the context of communicative language assessment by Katsumasa (1997) the following rules are:

(i) Knowing what you are measuring

(ii) Measuring the ability to deal with discourse

(iii) Focusing on communication processes

(iv) Setting up real situations, and

(v) Realizing that mistakes are not always mistakes since poor grammar is not the only need for effective communication and tiny errors rarely prevent communication.

The framework proposed by the OISE team is favored after reading and contrasting the principles of communicative language test design advanced by Katsumasa (1997). This is because it discusses how to generate advantageous washback. "Backwash is increasingly viewed as a portion of the impact a test may have on learners and teachers, on educational systems in general, and society at large," according to Foulder-Hughes and Cooke (2003). The OISE's emphasis on attempting to produce good washback is thus appreciated.

2. METHODS

This study is a literature survey. Data was collected from articles on the internet and international journals, which were then compiled and rediscussed.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
3.1. Communicative language characteristics test

Characteristics In addition to the guiding principles that the OISE team has set, communicative language exams contain a few fundamental elements that test designers should adhere to produce an effective test. There are five prerequisites for building up a communicative test, according to Brown (2005). These consist of integrated language abilities, authentic situations, unpredictable language intake, innovative language output, and meaningful communication. The test must, first and foremost, be built on communication that the pupils can relate to and that fulfills their specific needs. It needs to encourage and activate language that is helpful to them. Utilizing real-world scenarios can improve the chances of successful meaningful communication. A more significant point is that "language cannot be useful if it lacks context" (Weir, 1988). For pupils to demonstrate how strong their language competence is, communicative examinations also give them the chance to encounter and use the language receptively and constructively in real-world contexts. Brown

refers to the reality that it is typically hard to foresee what speakers will say, i.e., language input, or to prepare for one's reply, i.e., language output, by highlighting "unpredictable language input" and "creative language output." A communicative test should mimic this organic style of communication. A communicative test's final feature is that it will urge pupils to use a variety of language abilities, just like in everyday conversation.

3.2. Communicative tasks evaluation

Brown (2005) concluded that performance evaluation and task-based assessment are two suitable methods for creating communicative tests based on characteristics of communicative tests and components of communicative assessment. In language testing situations, both are crucial. However, Byrnes (2002) study characterized task-based evaluation. According to Brown, Hudson, Byrnes, and Bonk's concept of task-based language evaluation from 2002, Therefore, in task-based language evaluation, we are interested in eliciting and assessing students' capacities to complete certain activities, or task types, where target language communication is crucial. Because a student's performance on the task in their second language is what is evaluated, this evaluation is a performance assessment. Examples of communicative assessment tasks with the theme of an environmental issue are provided below (Byrnes, 2002). Due to this, these exercises may be appropriate for intermediate to advanced English students who wish to enhance their language proficiency. The student's objectives are to be able to apply all language skills successfully, to accurately use terminology and idioms used in certain contexts and tasks, such as those involving the environment and social issues, and to use advertisements to urge people to engage in social activities.

The tasks can be divided and used effectively by teachers. Both scenarios are thought to be equally valid for the task, and test creators can still assess students' communicative language proficiency. Creators of tests must develop scoring guidelines as they evaluate students' performance. The recommendations supplied by Byrnes (2002) for creating comprehensive scoring criteria for evaluating students' performance on an assignment were a blessing. They recommended the following stages for assessment based on the research of Herman *et al.* (1992):

(i)   Investigate how the assessed discipline defines quality performance.
(ii)   Collect examples of assessment rubrics for writing, speech, the arts, and other subjects to use as models for your modifications.
(iii) Gather samples of students' and experts' work that demonstrate the range of performance from ineffective to very effective.
(iv)   Discuss with others the characteristics of these models that distinguish the effective ones from the ineffective ones.
(v)   Write descriptors for the important characteristics.
(vi)   Gather another sample of students' work.
(vii) Discuss with others the characteristics of these models that distinguish the effective ones from the ineffective ones.
(viii) Revise your criteria.
(ix)   Try it again until the rubric score captures the 'quality' of the work.

It takes a lot of responsible and cooperative labor, agreement on how to apply the rubric, and trials before it is utilized to construct the scoring criteria for tasks used to evaluate learners' proficiency in the target language.

3.3. Test score determinants

The results of examinees on tests of communicative ability are significantly influenced by a variety of factors, including test method characteristics, personal characteristics, and random variables. Five categories of test technique facets were categorized by McNamara (2003):

(i) testing environment, which includes familiarity with the location and apparatus, the staff, the time of the exam, and one's physical condition.

(ii) Test rubrics involving test organization, time allocation, and instruction.

(iii) The nature of the input, concerning format, and nature of language.

(iv) The nature of the expected response, referring to format, nature of language, and restrictions on response.

(v) Language relationships assess whether there are adaptive, nonadaptive, or reciprocal linkages between the input and the answer.

The final component, reciprocal language usage, is defined as "the use of language to cause an effect in another individual through the lowering of ambiguity with knowledge of results" McNamara (2003). To put it another way, what one person says influences what the other person can or will say in a spoken or written exchange between people. Reading, listening to lectures, and other non-reciprocal activities have "no connection between language users, feedback, and effect of language use," in contrast to reciprocal language usage. When the input and response have an adaptive relationship, the feedback that distinguishes a reciprocal relationship is absent. This means that, for instance, a test taker's performance on one particular activity or test item will influence the tasks and items that are appropriate for him or her moving forward. In addition, according to McNamara (2003), test methods should be methodical, which calls for uniform test forms. For instance, if the test is created in a multiple-choice format, it should remain multiple-choice when it is administered a second time. For the greatest performance of the test subjects, test constructors should be aware of the effects of various test method features and attempt to minimize their impact.

The characteristics of persons should be the next consideration for those who design communicative tests. Both individual and group qualities are included in an individual's attributes. While group factors may include sex, race, and ethnic origin, individual characteristics typically relate to cognitive style and mastery of particular content areas. Danili and Reid (2006) as well as McNamara (2003) were concerned about how the testee's cognitive style might affect how well they performed on the test. He emphasized that cognitive types like "convergent/divergent" and "field dependent/field independent" correspond with and somewhat influence test takers' performance. The statement that "knowledge of economics is likely to affect an individual's performance on any examination in which economics is presented as propositional material" is an illustration of knowledge of schooling. A cause of mistakes in the assessment of communicative language skills is personal characteristics as well. An individual's test results are also impacted by random or irrational circumstances. Random factors are uncontrollable and typically transient events, such as test subjects' varying levels of mental attentiveness, unavoidable variations in test design (such as moving the test to a different day), or distinctive variations among test administrators. The unpredictability of the scales, the lack of a sufficient linguistic sample, or restrictions on observation and quantification are some other unsystematic issues.

These illustrations of arbitrary variables do serve as a warning to test creators, however, that interpretations of test taker performance based on test results may not provide an accurate representation of their language proficiency (Haristiani & Rifai, 2021). In summary, test technique aspects, test taker characteristics, and random elements are some of the

variables that could potentially affect examinees' performance. These variables are regarded as causes of measurement error regardless of whether they are classified as systematic or unsystematic variables. As a result, testers should be aware of their impact and understand that concluding a person's language proficiency based only on a test result is not always accurate and dependable. Assessment accuracy and reliability of test-makers judgments increase as extraneous influences are reduced.

3.4. Communicative language test difficulties

Test designers must overcome the issue of testing in communicative languages. Predictive validity is one of the causes. One of the fundamental rules for creating a test of communicative skills is to determine the demands of test takers based on the communicative situations they are most likely to encounter (Rivky *et al*., 2022). The ability of test-makers to ensure that test-takers who perform well on a test in class would also perform well outside the classroom in a real-life setting is uncertain, though. One explanation for this is the unpredictable nature of real-life communication. Studies have shown that test creators have attempted to create real-world activities but have run into problems due to the variable or varied nature of situations (Fairbairn, 2005).

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a team at the OISE has developed a communicative view of language competency that is founded on four principles for designing communicative tests. The guiding ideas are to begin someplace, focus on the substance, have an advantage for the best, and work on washback. A communicative test provides meaningful communication for students in authentic settings where they can use all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—to express themselves creatively. It is crucial to remember that whether test results are trustworthy or not depends not just on aspects unrelated to test takers' language proficiency but also on how well raters have been trained in the appropriate scoring criteria and methods. The implementation of communicative tests is doable and promises positive impacts on the contexts of English instruction and training. The communicative teaching method, which is already used in the majority of college-level English programs, benefits communicative testing in language instruction. The communicative language teaching strategy is quite popular in some teacher-training institutions, and it gives students a greater grasp of English as well as teaching techniques that help to build their stellar reputations for success as teachers once they graduate. The use of communicative tests in addition to the communicative teaching method is both reasonable and necessary to assess students' communication abilities. The old examinations that are grammar-based must be replaced by communicative tests in language training. Teachers could more properly assess their students' language proficiency by implementing communicative testing in language instruction. There should be an opportunity for a method to help the students grow accustomed to the type of testing they may experience when taking foreign exams.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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