TEST DESIGN AND ASSESSMENT

Summary Lectures for 4th year students

2nd Lecture: Approaches to Language Testing

Summarized by

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1. Approaches to Language Testing

1.2. Essay-Translation Approach

This is commonly referred to as the pre- scientific stage of language testing. No special skill or expertise in testing is required. Tests usually consist of essay writing, translation and grammatical analysis. Tests have a heavy literary and cultural bias. Public examinations resulting from the tests using this approach sometimes have an oral component at the upper intermediate and advance levels.

Strengths of Essay- Translation Approach are:
  a) Teachers will simply use their subjective judgement.
  b) The essay-translation approach may be used for testing any level of examinees.
  c) The model of tester can easily be modified based on the essentials of the tests.

The Weaknesses of Essay- Translation Approach are:
  a) Subjective judgement of teachers tends to be biased.
  b) the tests have a heavy literary and cultural bias.

2.2. Structuralism Approach

This approach views that language learning is chiefly concerned with systematic acquisition of a set of habits. The structuralism approach involves structural linguistics which stresses the importance of constructive analysis and the need to identify and measure the learners' mastery of the separate elements of the target language such as phonology, vocabulary and grammar. Testing the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing is separate from another as much as possible. The psychometric approach to measurement with its emphasis on reliability and objectivity forms an integral part of structuralism testing.

Strengths of Structuralism Approach
  a) In testing students' capability, this approach may objectively and surely be used by testers.
  b) Many forms of tests can be covered in the test in a short time.
  c) Using this approach in testing will help students find their strengths and weaknesses in every skill they study.

Weaknesses of Structuralism Approach

a) It tends to be a complicated job for teachers to prepare questionnaires using this approach.

b) This approach considers measuring non- integrated skills more than integrated skills.

1.3. Integrative Approach

This approach involves the testing of language in context and is thus concerned primarily with meaning and the total communicative effect of discourse. Integrative tests are concerned with a global view of proficiency. Integrative testing involves functional language but not the use of functional language. The use of cloze test, dictation, oral interview, translation and essay writing are included in many integrative tests.

Strengths of Integrative Approach

a) The approach to meaning and the total communicative effect of discourse will be very useful for students in testing.

b) This approach can view students' proficiency with a global view.

c) A model cloze test used in this approach measures the reader's ability to decode 'interrupted' and 'mutilated' messages by making the most acceptable substitutions from all the contextual clues available

d) Dictation, another type using this approach, was regarded solely as a means of measuring students' skills of listening comprehension.

Weakness of Integrative Approach

a) Even if many think that measuring integrated skills is better, sometimes there is a need to consider the importance of measuring skills based on students' need, such as writing only, speaking only, etc.

1.4. Communicative Approach

Communicative tests are concerned primarily with how language is used in communication. Language use is often emphasized to the exclusion of language usage. The attempt to measure different language skills incommunicative tests is based on a view of language referred to as divisibility hypothesis. The test content should totally be relevant for a particular group of examinees and the tasks set should relate to real-life situation.
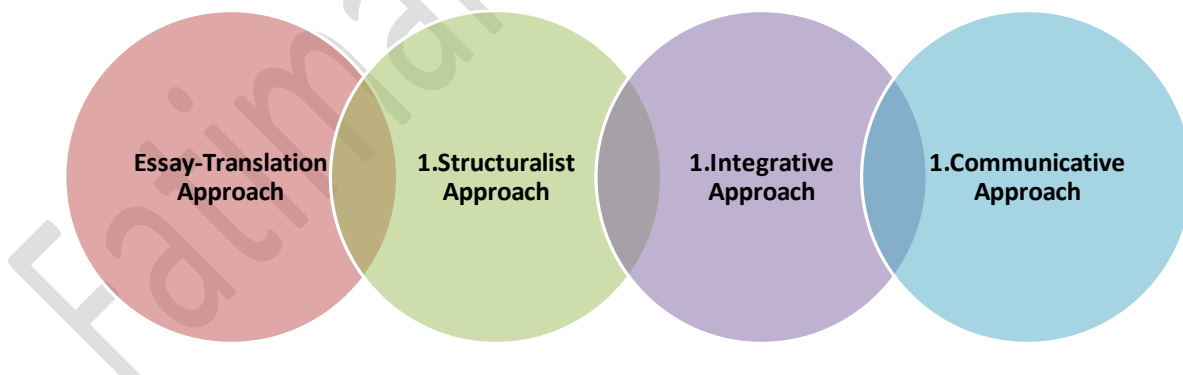
Communicative testing introduces the concept of qualitative modes of assessment in preference to quantitative modes of assessment.

Strengths of Communicative Approach

a) Communicative tests are able to measure all integrated skills of students.

b) The tests using this approach face student in real life so it will be very useful for them.

c) Because a communicative test can measure all language skills, it can help students in getting the score. Consider students who have a poor ability in using spoken language but may score quite highly on tests of reading.

d) Detailed statements of each performance level serve to increase the reliability of the scoring by enabling the examiner to make decisions according to carefully drawn-up and well- established criteria.

Weaknesses of Communicative Approach

a) Unlike the structuralism approach, this approach does not emphasize learning structural grammar, yet it may be difficult to achieve communicative competence without a considerable mastery of the grammar of a language.

b) It is possible for cultural bias to affect the reliability of the tests being administered.

Essay-Translation Approach | 1.Structuralist Approach | 1.Integrative Approach | 1.Communicative Approach

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