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ЯКІСНА МОВНА ОСВІТА У СУЧАСНОМУ ГЛОБАЛІЗОВАНОМУ СВІТІ: ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ, ВИКЛИКИ, ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ

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QUALITY LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT
IN UNIVERSITY EFL CLASSROOM

In recent years, teachers have become increasingly interested in the methodology by which the attitudes, knowledge and *skills* of EFL learners can be constructively developed. In line with this strand, European language examinations focus upon assessing a learner's ability to *use* the language, and do not concentrate on testing whether learners can recite the rules of the language, or how many words they have learned, or whether they sound like a perfect native speaker. Modern language assessments are not interested in whether students can transform isolated sentences into paraphrased versions, or whether they can give a definition of a word out – or even within – the context. They are also rarely interested in whether the learner can translate sentences in his/her first language into the target language, or whether (s)he can translate sentences from the target language into the mother tongue or, indeed, whether (s)he can give the mother tongue equivalent of an underlined word in an English passage. What *is* imperative in modern language assessment is whether students can meet their communication needs both in written and spoken modes, even if, at the lower levels, they may do this without 100% accuracy or fluency.

The key to modern language assessment is to challenge the test-takers with the tasks that in some way resemble the things they may have to do with the language in real life: what matters to examination results stakeholders – employers, universities, foreign institutions etc. – is how well the candidates can get their meaning across or understand others' meanings in relevant situations of everyday, academic or professional life.

The common strand running through all the modern research papers is the recognition that EFL teaching, part of which is assessment, is a highly complex and extremely demanding activity that in most contexts requires far more of practitioners than the simple transmission of facts and knowledge to passive and receptive students. In the classroom, teachers appear to be under a constant pressure to shape and respond to events – in other words, to *act*, be it a matter of teaching or a question of assessing what you have taught and what your students have learnt as a result of your teaching.

So how can EFL teachers be helped to develop their professional competence, particularly the one in language assessment, to cope with the different roles, skills and behaviours required of them in the classroom? How can they be assisted to make a connection between what and how they teach and what they experience when it comes to evaluating the results of their daily teaching reality? Surely not by their sitting passively and receiving "wisdom" from "experts". Much will undoubtedly depend on teachers' commitment to build "experts' expertise" into their own personal and professional development.

The concept underpinning this paper is understanding language testing as "a method of measuring a person's ability or knowledge in a given domain" [3]. The fundamental tenet of the workshop presented at the Conference is the claim that it is only by trying to operationalize our theories and our understandings of the constructs through our assessment instruments that we can explore and develop our understanding of the "ways that are appropriate for a given purpose, context, and group of test-takers" [1, 2; 2, 9]. The workshop shares personal insights gained from practices of teaching ESP students and reflections on how and to what extent the knowledge of basic principles of language assessment has been operationalised so far in the university classroom, and what implications this experience can bring about for classroom based assessment (CBA).

As a matter of fact, EFL teachers of Business English (as well as language teachers at large) have some beliefs about what classroom language assessment/testing is and what language tests are like. We have never taken this field professionally, so most of us are sure that testing is

just a part of teaching English, there is nothing difficult or problematic about testing for us, and all in all we feel happy enough about the ideas that Bachman and Palmer [2] identified as "the most common misconceptions of language testing". Commonly, most EFL teachers:

• *believe that there is one "best" test for any given situation.* As language teachers, we do believe that if we follow the model of a test that has been designed and developed by the "expert" in the field and the test has been was widely recognized and used, it would automatically be useful for our particular needs;

• *misunderstand the nature of language testing and language test development and the nature of correlation between language testing, language teaching and language use.* We rarely consider the dichotomy language testing :: language learning with respect to the former having laws and regulations which might differ from those of the latter. Besides, we do realize that cognitive processes involved in language use and, correspondingly, language learning are not the same for all learners and vary with different language activities. But we rarely (if ever) doubt whether similar testing procedures require similar cognitive efforts and strategies from different individuals whom they have for their target population. So we practically never analyse if a single model would provide the most suitable test for the variety of our particular test-takers, particular uses and areas of language ability that are to be measured in our particular situation;

• *have unreasonable expectations about what language tests can do and what they should be, and place blind faith in the technology of measurement.* AS EFL teachers, we always want an "expert" to offer us some ready-made recipe of an "ideal" language test as well as to teach how to create such "good" test. But for the majority of language teachers the very concept of a "good" language test is vague and abstract enough for we have no idea of what is supposed to be good about the test to make it really "good" – should that be its layout; the text selected; the task format chosen; the correlation between the task format and the skill we intend to measure; the language of the rubric – whatever?!

In fact, the seeming "simplicity" of language assessment and testing can appear rather misleading. As language teachers who are also directly involved in the process of measuring students' skills and competences, we should always keep in mind the following ideas:

• there are no "trifles" in language assessment – every single detail matters!

- the testing cycle is long and very complicated: it embraces a lot of stages and typically includes conducting needs analysis; identifying the construct for each of the skills measured; designing, developing and calibrating items as long as they fully correspond to the norms of test appropriateness; administering the test; doing with the performance statistics and reporting on test results; getting feedback on the test and dealing with the washback effect to follow;

- quality language assessment should necessarily be related to language teaching and language use: if we claim that the score from a language test is an indicator of individual's language ability and can be used to make certain decisions, then we must make sure that performance on it is related to language use in non-test situations – test tasks and situations should correlate with the language use tasks and situations, while characteristics of a test taker (his/her background knowledge, cognitive schemata, language ability) should correspond to those of a language user;

- what should be built into assessment practices in a FL classroom are considerations of fairness: those who are in test design and test administration are to be accountable for the way the assessment results are used;

- test-takers should be provided with as complete information about the entire testing procedure as possible: this will help to humanize the testing process in at least two possible ways – encouraging and enabling students to perform at their highest level of ability on the one hand, and creating conditions for washback to follow in language teaching process, on the other hand;

- there can never be a 'perfect' or an 'ideal' test that would fit any situation, any target audience, any specification: rather than being 'perfect' or 'ideal', your assessment instrument should be *useful*, and an overriding consideration for quality control throughout the process of designing, developing and using a particular language test should be assessor's awareness of how reliable, valid, authentic, interactive, and practical the assessment is, and how effectively it helps to shape classroom teaching methodology to achieve better learning/teaching outcomes.

In summary, EFL teachers make use of variety of approaches in their classroom for evaluating students' learning progress, ranging from asking a simple informal question to administering a full-scale formalized test. However, as Dr. Stephen Bax, Professor in Applied Linguistics (CRELLA

Research Centre, University of Bedfordshire) puts it, in many cases the classroom-based assessment does not, in practice lead to improved learning. Having analysed most common shortcomings in CBA, he suggests a ***VOICES*** model where the word VOICES is made up from the first letters of six points that give six crucial ways for developing more effective CBA practice. In general, S. Bax claims that classroom based assessment should be:

*V*aried – teachers should vary their assessment modes so that they are as engaging as possible, cover as many different aspects of language learning as possible, and allow students with different styles and modes of learning to shine;

*O*ngoing – it should be part of every lesson and as many activities as possible;

*I*ntegrated – it should be linked to the syllabus as tightly as possible and connected to everyday teaching in a way which is clear for students and for everyone else to see;

*C*ollaborative – involving not only other teachers, but also students themselves, as well as other stakeholders so that the whole process is seen as transparent, fair, comprehensive and accurate;

*E*videnced – assessment results should be recorded so that students could see their learning progress;

*S*ystematic – it should be carefully planned and structured in an organized and regular way.

One more important point, as S. Bax puts it, is that using this ***VOICES*** mnemonic can help teachers include the *voices* of their learners more significantly in their pedagogy.

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