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**On Some Assessment Procedures  
of Our Students' Foreign  
Language Proficiency**

The article considers the problem of foreign language learning proficiency evaluation. An evaluation component is an essential part of educational process; practically it is part of everyday learning process. Before starting teaching a foreign language we should take a decision how we are going to measure outcomes and make clear for ourselves the role of assessment and its instructional value in language acquisition process. Assessment occurs in many contexts and is done for a variety of reasons. Depending on the aims of the tests there are proficiency, placement, diagnostic, and achievement tests. As a rule our students are exposed to all these tests.

**Key words:** assessment, evaluation, proficiency test, placement test, foreign language competence.

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**Біздің студенттердің шет тілі  
біліктіліктерін бағалаудың  
жолдары**

Мақалада шет тілдер оқу үдерісінде студенттердің қабылдаған дағдыларын тексеру және бағалау процедуралары туралы сөз жүргізіледі. Шет тілі біліктілігін бағалау күнделікті сабақтың мақсатының бірі және жүйелі түрде жүргізілетін жұмыс. Шет тілін оқытуды басталғаннан студенттердің шет тілі біліктілігін бағалаудың мәнін және оның студенттердің оқу үдерісінде қандай әсер ететінін белгілеп алуымыз керек себебі бағалаудың жолдары көп және алуан түрлі. Бағалаудың мақсатына және студенттердің қабылдаған дағдыларының деңгейіне байланысты тестілер іріктелініп қолданылуы тиісті.

**Түйін сөздер:** баға, бағалау, қабылдаған дағдыларды тексеру тестері, шет тілі біліктілігі бағалау тестері.

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**О методах оценки знаний  
по иностранным языкам наших  
студентов**

В статье рассматривается проблема оценки знаний, навыков и умений, приобретаемых студентами в процессе изучения иностранных языков. Компонент оценки является неотъемлемой частью учебного процесса, элементом повседневного процесса обучения. Перед началом обучения иностранному языку мы должны принять решение, как мы будем измерять результаты и четко определить для себя роль оценки и ее обучающее значение в процессе приобретения языковых навыков. Оценивание происходит во многих контекстах и делается по целому ряду причин. В зависимости от целей проверок, существуют тесты на определение уровня знаний, на проверку навыков и умений, диагностический и тест на определение достижений. Как правило, наши студенты подвергаются все эти испытания.

**Ключевые слова:** оценка, оценивание, тест на определение уровня знаний, тест на проверку навыков, компетенции по иностранным языкам.

**ON SOME ASSESSMENT  
PROCEDURES OF  
OUR STUDENTS'  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE  
PROFICIENCY**

It is universally recognized that an evaluation component is an essential part of educational process; practically it is part of everyday learning process. Before starting teaching a foreign language we should take a decision how we are going to measure outcomes and make clear for ourselves the role of assessment and its instructional value in language acquisition process.

Assessment occurs in many contexts and is done for a variety of reasons. It has become a widely accepted tradition that the most common way to measure outcomes is the test.

Depending on the aims of the tests there are proficiency, placement, diagnostic, and achievement tests. As a rule our students are exposed to all these tests. On enrolling to the university they take proficiency, placement tests because we set the aim to identify the right level for a particular student, the peculiarity of this test is that there is no good or bad score, only recommendation for the most suitable group.

On the distribution of students into groups on the basis of the placement test results it is necessary to conduct a diagnostic test the aim of which is to check the students' knowledge before starting a particular course. According to Hughes diagnostic tests are supposed to determine the students' weak and strong points [1]. It provides the students with a variety of language elements, which will help the teacher to make a decision what language material he / she should focus on to achieve the desirable outcome. As a rule, at our university we offer a diagnostic test including two parts: writing a short composition on various topics as «My family», «My school», «About myself», «My hobby» and interviewing.

In the course of studies after the completion of a certain unit a progress test is conducted with the aim to measure learner's degree of mastery of different components that have been covered in the curriculum. The student's progress may be tested in most various ways – orally or in writing. It depends on the teacher's choice. At the department of foreign languages the teachers prefer to check the students' current knowledge of the material covered through giving a writing task – short compositions where the students are acquired to use active vocabulary and the grammatical structures of the unit. Besides, oral skills are tested through such speaking activities as role plays, answering provocative questions, group discussions,

case studies etc. much depends upon the teacher's creativity and resourcefulness. Thus we have an opportunity not only to measure the progress of our students' knowledge, but also to develop their communicative competences. Such method of evaluation of the students' progress in learning activities will not be stressful but an enjoyable experience.

One of the most important questions in measuring the students' language knowledge and skills acquired in the course of studies is to select the appropriate testing method. The content of the test should fully represent the content of the course. Specifically, the test tasks should correspond to the types of classroom learning activities included in the program. The selected testing method should enable teachers to make inferences about the students' abilities to use their skills in non-test language contexts- in real life situations.

At the end of the course of studies the achievement test is administered. Achievement test answers the question: How much the learner learnt from a particular course? Achievement test helps find out how well the students have mastered the language material and skills that have been covered on the course. As a rule, achievement tests are all-inclusive and occur at the end of the semester. In fact an achievement test is the measure of students' progress towards definite goals. It is the means for monitoring performance and evaluating the final outcome.

Al-Farabi university curriculum includes the course «Professionally oriented foreign language». It is a university course which has its own knowledge base, content and structure that aims to achieve Common European Standard of foreign language competence. The aim of the course is to develop professional communication competence in the fields of natural sciences, social sciences and humanities based on the «Common European Framework of Reference for Languages» [2]. The aimed results are the effective use of language in both daily and professional communication and provide students with the skills to use foreign language as a means of broadening and deepening systemic specialized knowledge and a means to enhance their professional qualification, prepare students to function in a technologically and socially changing world.

It must be pointed out that secondary school graduates who enter our university have different degrees of language proficiency and depending on this fact we define the end result in the following language skills. By the end of the course the

students should be able to communicate on a variety of general, educational and professional issues, understand the main points and a general idea of presentations and lectures on their professional topics, understand texts of common and professional content, built on the frequency language material, make presentations, etc.

The purpose of students' knowledge control is to encourage active participation of students in the educational and research work and to provide maximum objectivity of comprehensive assessment of knowledge and students' practical skills, their ability to conduct independent research work.

According to the study program the evaluation and assessment are carried out constantly at every lesson. Twice within the semester the student's progress is tested in midterm and final controls. In the end of the semester achievement test is administered when students take final examinations.

Current test is carried out at every lesson in oral and written forms. In accordance with the course program the students' current performance is evaluated during the whole foreign language learning period in the form of written control works, lexical and grammar tests, presentations, oral control of the material covered, essays, round tables, discussions, role-plays, case studies, reports and translation of texts on their specialties, etc. Total grade point for the student's academic performance is assigned for the level of overall achievement, i.e. grade for each attestation is taken into account when placing an overall assessment of the subject. Midterm test is carried out on the 7th and 15th weeks in the form of oral and written tests which check the achievements in the following aspects: listening, vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension and writing.

We prefer to test the students' speaking skills in Midterm examinations. Testing speaking skills deserve special consideration. In this paper we think it appropriate to dwell shortly on this topic. Testing speaking skills has always been one of the most difficult aspects within language teaching program. It is because formally speech involves two persons: a person who speaks and a person who listens. It is a two-way system of communication and there must be one more person who assesses that speech. In oral tests there doesn't exist any 'test', it is the people and their communication skills that are evaluated. The aim of an assessor here is to encourage the people to talk as natural as possible. Oral tests radically differ from conventional written tests; here we deal with real people and their ability to perform in a foreign

language, and namely this fact makes oral tests the most complicated process of evaluation.

In general the test situation for most students is very stressful. Real people meet tet-a-tete and communicate with each other on a given topic and within a limited time the only thing needed is to talk to each other and behave as natural as possible so that he/she is able to demonstrate his/her listening and speaking skills in the best possible way. Psychologically for some people it is difficult to control their emotions because the requirement is to produce grammatically correct utterances, speak fluently with proper intonation and pronunciation. Experience shows that very often they feel unconfident about their skills, worry about their pronunciation and their grammatical accuracy. The students may have word-finding difficulties that result in halting the conversation flow. It should be always born in mind that testing in no way must have a negative effect on psychological state of a testee.

The advantage of oral testing is that the learner is rated on his ability to manage to keep the conversation going and not to lose the floor but not on grammatical accuracy although it is taken into account. According to Stephen D. Krashen «encouraging students to participate in conversation and develop their skills to manage conversations will contribute a great deal to the development of their grammatical accuracy. Indeed, they will develop, perhaps, more grammatical accuracy in the long run than any other kind of measure» [3]. The test techniques should necessarily be suited to the levels of learners' general proficiency, for example, 'question answer' technique is good for lower levels while 'discussion /conversation' technique is more suitable for higher levels. There exist a wide variety of test techniques (approximately sixty) which can be divided into two big groups – dialogues and monologues. We predominantly practice the following techniques: discussion / conversation, oral report, learner-learner joint discussion / decision making, role play, interview, presentation, question and answer, using a picture or picture story, giving instructions, précis or re-tell a story or text from aural stimulus, translating / interpreting, sentence transformation, sentence repetition and others.

The final exam may vary in accordance with the competence level of a particular student, group and the specificity of the material studied. This exam includes the written tasks which help identify the level of students' final achievement. At our University we choose rendering of the original text on specialty of a student as the first test item.

Why rendering or translation? The debate over whether English language classrooms should include translation has been a controversial issue for a long time [4]. Although the use of translation was not welcomed by the supporters of the direct method at the end of the nineteenth century, lately the positive role of the mother tongue has been recognized, if used judiciously, as one of the effective means of foreign language teaching and learning [5]. We consider translation as an essential social skill and a useful language learning tool preparing our students for real life situations. In English class we try to develop translation skills of our students which enable them to read and understand the original texts on their specialty and draw information they need for academic and professional activities. Nowadays translation is recognized as the fifth skill as well as reading, speaking, listening and writing. The overwhelming majority of non-native teachers of English agree that one of the most essential prerequisites of the development of translation skills is vocabulary growth. Language researchers state that for basic reading instruction students need to know 2000 most frequent vocabulary items which account for 80% of all words in texts. When selecting the testing task rendering or translation of the special text we stem from the assumption that translation and rendering activities encompass a range of competences such as reading comprehension, knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Correct translation and rendering of the text involves knowledge of word order variation, clause formation, complex noun phrase structures and types of style.

The second test item in the final examination is asking questions about the text. The reason for including this test item in the final examination is as follows: it is our firm belief that questioning plays a critical role in the way teachers shape the class environment, organizes the content of the course, and questioning also has deep implications in the way that students assimilate the information that is presented and discussed in class. Asking the right question is a good stimulus to effective communication and information exchange. By teaching students to ask the right questions in a particular situation, we can improve their communication skills, for example, they can gather better information and learn more; they can build stronger relationships, manage people more effectively and help others to learn too.

Given that questioning can be a tremendously effective way to teach, and recognizing that teachers strive hard to engage students in the process of asking questions correctly while instructing we

consider it right to include into achievement test asking questions about the text as a testing item.

The third testing item that achievement test includes is writing on the topic. As a rule the topics offered are familiar to the students from the teaching material which they have covered in the course of studies. In our case the topics reflect the professional areas the students major in.

As it is known writing skills are an important part of communication. Writing well involves more than simply documenting ideas as they come to mind. It is a process that requires that the writer thinks carefully about the purpose for writing, plan what to say, plan how to say it, and understand what the reader needs to know. While developing writing skills we focus on teaching the following writing strategies that include planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revising, and editing.

Although we have very limited time for teaching writing skills (only three credits) we try hard to cultivate their skills to write on a variety of topics that are familiar or of personal interest. According to the examination requirements the students should be able to compose simple and complex sentences using a variety of verb tenses and moods.

The results of 2015-16 academic year final examination demonstrate that the overwhelming

majority of students have successfully completed «Professionally Oriented Foreign Language» course. They showed that they can render the texts on their specialty from English into Russian or Kazakh, ask questions about the text and write coherent stories on the topics they have covered during their learning process. The analysis of the examination outcomes shows that the testing item «Render the text from English into Russian / Kazakh» hasn't presented much difficulty for our students. Their written rendering of texts on their specialty indicated that the sufficient vocabulary stock the students have built during the learning process helped them to cope with the first testing task. We see that they had more problems with the second and the third testing tasks: «Ask questions about the text» and «Write on the topic». There were mistakes in their questions and writing tasks, nevertheless we see that they can convey their ideas and give information on the topics required. The mistakes they have made do not interfere understanding the idea they wanted to express. It is a universally known truth that learning a foreign language is a never-ending process, and we hope very much that our students will continue learning English, and in the future they will definitely improve their language competence.

#### References

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