

2.4 Language assessment

Transcript

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In this module, we will be examining English as a Lingua Franca from the standpoint of Language Assessment. We'll first examine different types of assessment and then investigate how assessment can be culturally and linguistically sensitive and flexible.

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Before starting, think about what you believe about assessment. Please work through activity one, rating each statement on a scale of one to five, with one being that you disagree, 5 that you agree with the statement. Afterwards, please click on the link to share your views and perhaps take some time to listen to other views that people have shared.

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To begin, we will cover different types of assessment: summative assessment, formative Assessment, and alternative assessment.

Summative assessment, or testing, is used to take a snapshot of what a learner knows at a given point in time. It is typically taken at the middle and/or at the end of a unit, semester, term, or school year. It typically tests only a small sample of what a learner actually knows, such as testing that a student has memorized a set vocabulary list or can use a specific grammatical function and is graded for accuracy and correctness against a native speaker model.

Formative assessment focuses on the learning process and how the student is progressing in their understanding of the course material. It takes into account and allows for learners to show their overall language ability.

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Alternative assessment is a classroom-based model. The assessment criteria, or what is being examined, is based on the lesson's learning aims which are presented to the student at the beginning of the module. In this type of assessment, learners are given feed-forward ideas, in other words, strategies to help them continue their learning. The focus of alternative assessment is helping

the student to progress: what is the next step in their learning that the learner should focus on? This takes place in the classroom, and each lesson is focused on learning, working with, and perfecting various language skills and inventory. Alternative assessment encompasses a variety of assessment, including observations, that provides both the teacher and the learner evidence of progression.

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Here are some examples of the different types of assessment to help with the concepts. Can you think of other examples that would fit in each category?

Summative assessment, which provides a limited scope assessment at a specific point of time includes testing students at the end of the week, at the end of a unit, semester, or year. These tests may focus on a specific skill, such as speaking, writing, or grammar.

Formative assessment is also called assessment for learning, which is the process of giving students feedback throughout the learning process. It gives students specific goals to work on and is common when working with learners through the editing process, such as learners being asked to revise their work according to teacher comments.

Alternative assessment allows for assessment in all kinds of forms: using portfolios, working with creative projects such as theater or art, or interviews, either with the teacher or a fellow learner. Observation of group work and other classroom observations can also be helpful in making assessment of learning progression.

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What are the **goals** of the language learners? For activity 2, please read through the following list of assessment practices and think about these needs. Which of these needs influence your own teaching the most? You may choose up to three items.

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In activity two, we organized the lists of assessment practices in order from high-stakes, prescriptive tests that are set on native speaker standards, such as the IELTS or Cambridge Exam and then the list encompasses various levels of local and national government and school-wide testing. And then in the middle, British English is the only standard, the following bullet allows for any native variety of English. Generally speaking, we think of American and British as being the two standards. And then the last three bullets start to open up the field and start to think about English in native and non-native forms. A high proficiency in non-native English is a form that, regardless of the language background, forms

that are generally widely recognizable and understandable indicates a high proficiency. The final bullet point addresses the communicative ability of the learner. Communicative ability includes the ability of the user who can work to negotiate meanings so that they seek to understand and be understood.

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What is culturally sensitive assessment? Culturally sensitive assessment allows us to assess the wide inventory of knowledge that a learner may have, but may not be immediately observable in a traditional classroom and testing environment. Learners can demonstrate their mastery of skills through a variety of alternative assessment techniques, as we looked at briefly in the last section. For example, a learner may be able to demonstrate their knowledge by supplementing with pictures, or words from their other language inventories. Peer- and self-assessment is also useful, where learners can work with peers to try to better communicate their ideas.

Giving learners some choice, or autonomy, over what they will be assessed in, and how those items will be assessed, empowers them over their own learning processes and helps them to focus on discrete items in an assignment or activity. It also facilitates communication between the teacher and the learner throughout the learning process.

Finally, individual learning portfolios are very useful in helping to compile a picture of the learners' individual profile. What other languages does the learner use in their daily lives? What sorts of special abilities or needs does that learner have? For example, does that student have difficulty reading in all languages? Or are they particularly good at music and mimic language beautifully, providing a false high level of language knowledge?

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Assessment in **ELF** focuses on alternative measurements: effective communication, using all means necessary to communicate an idea, such as a combination of writing and speaking. It also focuses on the combination of listening and speaking when assessing oral skills. Classroom assessment practices are the norm, as opposed to summative assessment, and learners can demonstrate their language abilities through a wide variety of situations, thus giving the learner ample chance to show their language ability in a relaxed, natural, and communicative environment. The model that the learner is expected to follow is not that of a perfect native speaker, but rather of a language form that allows for true intercultural and interlingual communication, a form that is understandable rather than native. Understandable encompasses native and non-native spoken forms.

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In this sense, the focus is on strategic competence and effective communication rather than on perfect linguistic accuracy. As the goal for language learning ultimately is to communicate, emphasis is placed on how learners use accommodation skills and strategies for communication, such as asking for clarification, repetition, or restating what the listener understands what has been said.

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The list here summarizes a variety of communication strategies that collocutor, the speaker and the listener, and then back again, uses in order to effectively communicate. As you read through the list, think about what strategies you use when you communicate. Which of these strategies would be helpful to teach in the classroom? As a part of assessment, the students could be asked to focus on one particular skill and the teacher can use group and classroom observation to assess how students get on learning a given skill.

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ELF assessment, then, focuses on mutual intelligibility between speakers, focusing on communication rather than language forms. The success of communication takes precedence over the form of the language itself. And because the focus is on communication, then the assessment naturally includes two or more learners.

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Communication includes the speaker and the listener, and then the roles reverse. Is the communication clear and meaningful? And do the interlocutors negotiate for meaning as needed? This is the focus of ELF assessment. How well do interlocutors communicate, can they use a variety of communication strategies to negotiate for meaning, including slowing down so that the listener can understand them, and ultimately, are the goals of the communication activity achieved?

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ELF-aware assessment places the learner at the center of the learning process as the learner focuses on his or her own language development through learning how to clearly communicate with others. The learner participates in choosing what is being assessed, how it is being assessed (through a variety of differing activities and assessment forms) and is empowered to take ownership of their own progression. Progression is charted through set goals, and assessment can be completed by the teacher, peers, and/or through self-

assessment. In this way, a broader picture is created that helps both the teacher and the learner understand a learner's full language capacity and help plan how to progress.

Formative, culturally-sensitive assessment takes time. But it's worth it, because it helps the learner to develop into an autonomous, self-actualized user of the English language.

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Activity 3: Review part of a textbook or learning materials that are used in your classroom. How do they stand up to what you now know about English as a Lingua Franca and assessment?

- Are native speaker norms used to measure oral skills?
- Are any formative or alternative assessment practices included?
- Is communication the goal or linguistic perfection?

How would you adapt an assessment to be more ELF-aware. Please click the link under the video to share your views in the Forum.

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Activity Four: On the next slide is a sample observation form with a list of communication accommodation strategies. Say you are using this form to assess your students who are working in pairs. In the light of this context, what are your responses to the following questions of activity 4?

- Would it be possible to observe your learners while engaged in an oral activity in the classroom?
- Could you use this form in your classroom to assess learners' oral skills?
- How would you want to adapt this observation form for your local context?

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The following is list of accommodation strategies that good communicators use to negotiate for meaning.

Thank you for working through this module on assessment and ELF. We hope that it has given you some room for thought and has provided you with useful ideas on how to grow your own practice to be more ELF-aware.