

Ways of testing

In this chapter we will attempt to discuss various types of testing and if possible compare them. We will start with the most general ones and move to more specific and detailed ways of testing.

1 Direct and indirect testing

The first types of testing we are intended to discuss are direct and indirect testing. First, we will try to define each of them; secondly, we will endeavour to compare them.

We will commence our discussion with direct testing that according to Hughes (1989:14) means the involvement of a skill that is supposed to be tested. The following view means that when applying the direct testing the teacher will be interested in testing a particular skill, e.g. if the aim of the test is to check listening comprehension, the students will be given a test that will check their listening skills, such as listening to the tape and doing the accompanying tasks. Such type of test will not engage testing of other skills. Hughes (ibid.) emphasises the importance of using authentic materials. Though, we stipulate that the teacher is free to decide him/herself what kind of material the students should be provided with. If the teacher's aim is to teach the students to comprehend the real, native speech, s/he will apply the authentic material in teaching and later, logically, in tests. Developing the idea we can cite Bynom (2001:8) who assumes that direct testing introduces real-life language through authentic tasks. Consequently, it will lead to the usage of role-plays, summarising the general idea, providing the missing information, etc. Moving further and analysing the statements made by the linguists (Bynom, 2001; Hughes, 1989) we can posit the idea that direct testing will be task-oriented, effective and easy to manage if it tests such skills as writing or speaking. It could be explained by the fact that the tasks intended to check the skills mentioned above give us precise information about the learners' abilities. Moreover, we can maintain that when testing writing the teacher demands the students to write a certain task, such as an essay, a composition or reproduction, and it will be precisely the point the teacher will be intended to check. There will be certain demands imposed on writing test; the teacher might be just interested in the students' ability to produce the right layout of an essay without taking grammar into account, or, on the contrary, will be more concerned with grammatical and syntactical structures. What concerns testing speaking skills, here the author of the paper does not support the idea promoted by Bynom that it could be treated as direct testing. Definitely, you will have a certain task to involve your speaking skills; however, speaking is not possible without employment of listening skills. This in turn will generate the idea that

apart from speaking skills the teacher will test the students' ability to understand the speech s/he hears, thus involving speaking skills.

It is said that the advantages of direct testing is that it is intended to test some certain abilities, and preparation for that usually involves persistent practice of certain skills. Nevertheless, the skills tested are deprived from the authentic situation that later may cause difficulties for the students in using them.

Now we can shift to another notion - indirect testing. It differs from direct one in the way that it measures a skill through some other skill. It could mean the incorporation of various skills that are connected with each other, e.g. listening and speaking skills.

Indirect testing, regarding to Hughes, tests the usage of the language in real-life situation. Moreover, it suits all situations; whereas direct testing is bound to certain tasks intended to check a certain skill. Hughes (ibid.) assumes that indirect testing is more effective than direct one, for it covers a broader part of the language. It denotes that the learners are not constrained to one particular skill and a relevant exercise. They are free to elaborate all four skills; what is checked is their ability to operate with those skills and apply them in various, even unpredictable situations. This is the true indicator of the learner's real knowledge of the language.

Indirect testing has more advantages than disadvantages, although the only drawback according to Hughes is that such type of testing is difficult to evaluate. It could be frustrating what to check and how to check; whether grammar should be evaluated higher, than composition structure or vice versa. The author of the paper agrees with that, however, basing on her experience at school again, she must claim that it is not so easy to apply indirect testing. This could be rather time-consuming, for it is a well-known fact that the duration of the class is just forty minutes; moreover, it is rather complicated to construct indirect test – it demands a lot of work, but our teachers are usually overloaded with a variety of other duties. Thus, we can only hope on the course books that supply us with a variety of activities that involve cooperation of all four skills.

2 Discrete point and integrative testing

Having discussed the kinds of testing that deal with general aspects, such as certain skills and variety of skills in cooperation, we can come to the more detailed types as discrete point and integrative testing. According to Longman Dictionary of LTAL (112), discrete point test is a language test that is meant to test a particular language item, e.g. tenses. The basis of that type of tests is that we can test components of the language (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and spelling) and language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) separately. We can declare that discrete point test is a common test used by the teachers in our schools. Having studied a grammar topic or new vocabulary,

having practiced it a great deal, the teacher basically gives a test based on the covered material. This test usually includes the items that were studied and will never display anything else from a far different field. The same will concern the language skills; if the teacher's aim is to check reading skills; the other skills will be neglected. The author of the paper had used such types of tests herself, especially after a definite grammar topic was studied. She had to construct the tests herself basing on the examples displayed in various grammar books. It was usually gap-filling exercises, multiple choice items or cloze tests. Sometimes a creative work was offered, where the students had to write a story involving a certain grammar theme that was being checked. According to her observance, the students who studied hard were able to complete them successfully, though there were the cases when the students failed. Now having discussed the theory on validity, reliability and types of testing, it is even more difficult to realize who was really to blame for the test failures: either the tests were wrongly designed or there was a problem in teaching. Notwithstanding, this type was and still remains to be the most general and acceptable type in schools of our country, for it is easy to design, it concerns a certain aspect of the language and is easy to score. If we speak about types of tests we can say that this way of testing refers more to a progress test (You can see the examples of such type of test in Appendix 2).

Nevertheless, according to Bynom (2001:8) there is a certain drawback of discrete point testing, for it tests only separated parts, but does not show us the whole language. It is true, if our aim is to incorporate the whole language. Though, if we are to check the exact material the students were supposed to learn, then why not use it.

Discussing further, we have come to integrative tests. According to Longman Dictionary of LTAL, the integrative test intends to check several language skills and language components together or simultaneously. Hughes (1989:15) stipulates that the integrative tests display the learners' knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, spelling together, but not as separate skills or items.

Alderson (1996:219) poses that, by and large, most teachers prefer using integrative testing to discrete point type. He explains the fact that basically the teachers either have no enough of spare time to check a certain split item being tested or the purpose of the test is only considered to view the whole material. Moreover, some language skills such as reading do not require the precise investigation of the students' abilities whether they can cope with definite fragments of the text or not. We can render the prior statements as the idea that the teachers are mostly concerned with general language knowledge, but not with bits and pieces of it. The separate items usually are not capable of showing the real state

of the students' knowledge. What concerns the author of the paper, she finds integrative testing very useful, though more habitual one she believes to be discrete point test. She assumes that the teacher should incorporate both types of testing for effective evaluation of the students' true language abilities.