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К ВОПРОСУ ОБ ОЦЕНИВАНИИ ЗНАНИЙ СТУДЕНТОВ В ОБЛАСТИ ИНОСТРАННОГО ЯЗЫКА СРЕДСТВАМИ ЛИНГВОДИДАКТИЧЕСКОГО ТЕСТИРОВАНИЯ

© **Борис Георгиевич Солдатов¹, Наталья Викторовна Солдатова²**

¹Донской государственный технический университет, Ростов-на-Дону, Россия; ²Ростовский филиал Российской таможенной академии, Ростов-на-Дону, Россия

¹bsoldatov@rambler.ru ²natalya.nsoldatova @yandex.ru

Аннотация. Рассматриваются теоретические аспекты вопроса, связанного с лингводидактическими тестами как средством контроля уровня сформированности знаний и навыков студентов в области иностранного языка. Авторы статьи изучили исследования, касающиеся лингводидактического тестирования не только для теоретического обоснования системы педагогических тестов, но и для определения основных принципов составления тестов по изучаемой дисциплине. Изучается методологическая основа создания тестов как контролирующего средства. Проанализированы теоретические и практические основы лингводидактического тестирования, сформулированы содержательные аспекты различных типов тестов. Описаны планы разработки тестов и критериев тестов.

Ключевые слова: педагогический контроль, иностранный язык, типы тестов, оценка знаний, характеристики тестов, план разработки теста.

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PHILOLOGY

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Original article

On the issue of assessing students' foreign language knowledge by means of linguodidactic testing

© **Boris G. Soldatov¹, Natalya V. Soldatova²**

¹Don State Technical University, Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation; ²Russian Customs Academy Rostov Branch, Russia, Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation

¹bsoldatov@rambler.ru ²natalya.nsoldatova @yandex.ru

Abstract. The theoretical aspects of the issue related to linguistic and didactic tests as a means of monitoring the level of formation of students' knowledge and skills in the field of a foreign language are considered. The authors of the article studied studies related to linguodidactic testing not only for the theoretical justification of the pedagogical test system, but also to determine the basic principles of the composition of tests in the discipline under study. The methodological basis for creating tests as a monitoring tool is being studied. The theoretical and practical foundations of linguodidactic testing are analyzed, and the substantive aspects of various types of tests are formulated. Plans for the development of tests and test criteria are described.

Key words: pedagogical control, foreign language, types of tests, knowledge assessment, test characteristics, test development plan.

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Introduction

Pedagogical control is the object of theoretical research and the field of the teacher's practical activity. It is designed, on the one hand, to identify the effectiveness of interaction between teachers and students, on the other hand, to determine the progress students have achieved during their studies. Test monitoring is effective and efficient, as it helps to solve the problem of subjectivity in evaluation. It is the linguodidactic tests that provide for measuring the quality of learning.

The success of testing largely depends on the extent of students' understanding the testing procedure, the types of tasks to be performed, the ways of performance, and the assessment methodology. The test instructions are the means of providing them with information on these issues.

The test instructions should reflect the problems considered at the design stage and inform the students about the intentions of the test authors. The instructions should include: 1) the purpose of testing; 2) characteristics of the testing object; 3) description of the testing procedure and the types of tasks characteristics; 4) characteristics, assessment methods, including criteria [1; 2].

Methodology

The article deals with the research of the methodological basis for creating tests as a monitoring tool. The research methods applied by the authors include analytical and descriptive methods, the method of analyzing and summarizing the experience of linguistic and didactic testing.

Results

It should be emphasized that tests are an effective control tool provided they are created on a methodological basis.

One can start compiling and applying tests after becoming familiar with the factors that characterize the tests.

The application of foreign language tests can begin by clearly defining: 1) testing objectives; 2) test objects; 3) test performance methods; 4) the material to be tested; 5) test criteria.

Foreign language tests can be compiled and applied for the following purposes:

1) to check the students' actual knowledge, foreign language skills and abilities; 2) to find out if the student will be able to master a foreign language; 3) to verify the results achieved in the learning process; 4) to identify additional needs to be taught [3; 4]. According to these goals, it is customary to distinguish between several types of tests.

The first type of tests in the English and American test literature are called proficiency tests. These are tests to determine actual knowledge, skills and abilities. Proficiency tests can also be defined as qualification tests, i.e. these tests monitor the entire language experience acquired by students, regardless of the curriculum or program. These tests usually consist of 150 tasks divided into four sections that test proficiency: 1) grammar; 2/3) vocabulary; 4) reading. The structure of general skill tests varies. These tests can include: 1) a written essay; 2) tasks to check oral speech comprehension; 3) tasks to test lexical and grammatical skills; 4) tasks to test reading skills and comprehension [5; 6]. Depending on the goals, these tests can be called "Selection Tests" – tests based on which the applicants are selected, "Placement Tests" – tests for distributing students into groups according to the degree of proficiency in a foreign language, "Planning Instruction Tests" – tests for choosing a study program for a specific group of students.

The second type of tests are known as prognostic or aptitude tests. These are predictive or prospective tests. They evaluate the learner's ability to study the subject, his natural abilities, and aptitude. The determination of the objective linguistic characteristics of the student, his potential data for the language is the only criterion here. When conducting prospective testing, four factors are crucial: 1) the meaning and ability to use phonetic transcription; 2) sensitivity to the grammatical structure of the language; 3) the ability to memorize language material and reproduce it by heart; 4) the ability to learn languages by induction [7].

The third type of tests are called progress and achievement tests. These tests show the progress the student has made in the field of language during the controlled period and the results he has achieved in the learning process.

The fourth type of tests are called diagnostic tests. They determine which material should be studied. Their purpose is not to evaluate the learners' knowledge, but to obtain the information about the learners' knowledge in the field of the foreign language. These tests are given without time limits (unlike all types of tests) and serve the purpose of detecting difficulties encountered by students. Timely diagnostic tests and processing of the results make it possible to prepare special manuals based on the developed errors classification [10].

The tests are classified according to the following parameters: 1) structure; 2) application frequency; 3) content; 4) implementation form; 5) event organization form; 6) method of compilation and quantitative data processing [8].

According to the structure, it is possible to distinguish between simple tests and combined tests. Simple tests include one type of tasks, combined tasks involve performing tasks of various forms.

According to the frequency of application, there are such types of tests as: everyday, conducted in the classroom; periodic tests that are applied at a certain stage of the educational process and coincide with the end of studying a certain section or topic; global, which summarize the learning period.

According to the content, tests can be distinguished as single-aspect (phonetic, grammatical, lexical), on the one hand, and tests designed to test the skills of all four types of speech activity, on the other hand, and mixed.

According to their form, tests can be divided into written, oral and mixed.

According to the terms of the organization, classroom and laboratory tests are distinguished.

According to the way the data are compiled and quantified, the tests are divided into standardized, non-standardized, and locally standardized tests. The standardized test contains the description of the conditions and instructions for conducting it. Non-standardized tests are compiled by teachers for their students. Their difference from the control work is that they are tested to determine the difficulty of the tasks. Locally standardized tests occupy an intermediate position between standardized and non-standardized tests. Their difference from standardized tests is that they are made up by a small group of teachers (4–5 people) and only students of the certain university are tested. These are improved non-standardized tests.

After studying each of these tests, we arrive at the conclusion that they are used depending on the goal. They can be included as components in tests designed for specific purposes, i.e. to determine actual knowledge, skills and abilities, to forecast, to determine progress and achievements. The types of tests compiled in accordance with the knowledge, skills and abilities being tested are closely related to the testing objectives [9].

Having determined what the test should measure, it is necessary to choose the method of its implementation. The first approach to measuring it is based on the assumption that the best way to test whether a subject can use the language is to force the subject to use it, i.e. the speaking test should require the student to speak, the writing test is aimed at fulfilling writing tasks, etc. These are subjective tests [14].

Subjective tests include composition, essay, dictation. There are many elements included in each of these tests. For example, at first glance, such a simple test as dictation can reveal a number of different skills – spelling, differentiation of sounds and words, the ability to spell words correctly, find their graphic correspondences, and the ability to understand oral speech. Therefore, the verification and evaluation of subjective tests is difficult and requires separate consideration.

Unlike subjective tests, objective tests may be limited to the elements that the tester wants to check. Tests of this type can be generalized, standardized, and used to compare different groups, different students, or the same students at different stages of study. Although they are much more difficult to compile, the results can be promptly and easily evaluated.

Discussion

Many failures related to foreign language testing are due to insufficient attention to quality indicators or criteria for language tests at the planning stage. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate the main criteria that the language test should meet. These criteria are: 1) the suitability of the test; 2) test reliability; 3) the practicality of the test.

The first two criteria are among the most important, as they primarily characterize the quality of the test.

The suitability depends on the linguistic content of the test and on the method used to test this content. For example, the test that verifies grammar by performing exercises in the appropriate communicative situation, rather than by identifying knowledge of grammatical rules, is suitable.

In the test literature, it is customary to distinguish four types of test suitability: content validity, i.e. the test should reflect the content of an existing course of study; content suitability, i.e. the content of the test should reflect the everyday and professional experience of the test takers; concurrent validity, i.e. from the point of view of match or coincidence, the knowledge identified in the test matches the skills; construct validity, i.e. the suitability of the concept or the suitability of the requirements of the test compiler; prognostic validity, essential for predictive tests, which requires comparing the test indicators with some criterion of the subjects' subsequent activity. The suitability of the test is determined statistically [11].

Reliability is the robustness of test results. There are certain factors that affect the reliability of the tests. These factors are: 1) the representativeness of both strong and weaker students during the test, for which this test is intended; 2) the number of questions in the test; 3) the difficulty of the tasks; 4) uniformity of the group being tested; 5) differentiation of test tasks; 6) consistency of testing conditions.

The next criterion of the test is the criterion of practicality. The practical value of the test includes: 1) test instructions and test assignment formulations that are easy for students to understand; 2) the comparative simplicity of the test; 3) conducting testing in the usual conditions; 4) comparative simplicity of test verification.

Thus, the main criteria of linguodidactic tests are: suitability, reliability and practicality.

Specific control functions are implemented if three principles are followed – adequacy, consistency and activity.

The principle of adequacy contains two requirements for test tasks: they must be of equal difficulty and contain material that is representative of the entire group of control objects. The principle of activity provides for the mobilization of all aspects of students' intellectual activity – memory, attention, thinking.

The next step in updating the test requirements should be to draw up a detailed test development plan. The plan consists of two parts:

- a detailed description of each type of task contained in the test;
- determining the structure of the test, namely: a) the number of parts / tasks; b) the sequence of parts / tasks; c) the characteristic features of parts / tasks; d) the relative importance of parts / tasks; e) the number of tasks in each part [12; 13].

The plan can be used:

- to develop another test or parallel test forms with the same characteristics (parallel test forms can be compiled using a test task bank, which is a set of tasks compiled using the same specifications);
- to assess the intentions of the test compiler, which is not always quite obvious from the text itself;
- to assess the compliance of the finished test with the plan on the basis of which it is compiled;
- to assess the test authenticity, i.e. the correspondence between the characteristics of the tasks on linguistic phenomena and the test tasks described in detail in the plan.

It is also recommended to take into account the following:

- The tasks in the test must contain varying degrees of difficulty.
- Assignments should be formulated in such a way that the test taker demonstrates all the knowledge on the subject.
- Test assignments should contain different questions on the same topic.
- Ambiguous statements should not be included in the wording of test assignments.
- The uniformity of the questions and the total number of words in the answers. The location of the correct answer should not be repeated in the tasks [12].

Conclusions

Thus, tests perform control functions that are considered fundamental to control as a special part of the learning process. But tests as a means of control have their own characteristics that enhance their control functions, namely validity, reliability and practicality. And, therefore, it is legitimate to use tests as one of the types of control in universities at the present time.

The measurement objects in the educational process are specific, and the test results depend on the formalization of the test objects and the entire testing process. Linguodidactic tests should be considered as standardized tasks based on the main characteristics: suitability, reliability and practicality. The use of linguistic and didactic testing in teaching significantly increases the objectivity and accuracy of evaluating performance.

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