بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Approaches to Language Testing

-4th Lecture-

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Issues in Language Assessment:

Then & Now

1940s & 1950s:

- An era of behaviourism
- Special attention to contrastive analysis
- Language tests focus on specific linguistics elements such as phonological, grammatical, and lexical contrasts between two languages.

1970s & 1980s:

- An era of communicative theories of language
- More integrative views on testing
- Specialists claim "the whole of the communicative event was considerably greater than the sum of its linguistic elements".

Behavioural Approach
(Discrete- Point Testing)

Time:
- Middle of 20th Century

Impact

Behavioural psychology & Structural Linguistics

Main Focus
- Sentence-level grammatical paradigm,
- Definitions of vocabulary items, &
- Translation from 1st to 2nd language

Minor Focus
- Real- world authentic communication

Typical Tests format
- MCQ Items of grammar & vocabulary
- Translation exercises (words/ sentence/ short paragraphs)

Assumption
- Language can be broken down into components parts which can be tested successfully
- Language components are the four skills + Units of language (phonology, morphology, syntax, etc.)
- An overall language proficiency test should sample all four skills & as many linguistic discrete points as possible

** Discrete-Point testing provided fertile ground to Psychometric-Structuralist App to Lang Assessment (Spolsky) in which test designers focus on issues of:
- validity, reliability, & objectivity.

Example Tests:
Admission tests like:
- TOEFL & Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency

** Later, the approach proved to be inauthentic

Integrative Approach

Trend:

- **Language pedagogy movement towards communication**

Emphasis

- **Communication, authenticity, & context**

Assumption

- **Language competence was a unified set of interacting abilities that could not be tested separately (John Oller)**

Claim

- **Communicative competence (CC) is so global and requires such integration that it cannot be captured in additive tests of grammar, voc, & other discrete points of language.**

Types of tests

- **Cloze Test & Dictation Test**

Cloze Test claimed features

- **Test results were good measures of overall proficiency**
- **Supplying appropriate words in blanks requires competence in language (which is essence of global language proficiency)**

Dictation claimed features

- **Tests taps into grammatical and discourse competencies which are required for other modes of performance in language.**
- **Success requires careful listening, reproduction of writing, & efficient short-term memory**

Dictation test features

- **Practicality & reliability (just like MCQ)**

Unitary Trait Hypothesis

- **All language components cannot be divided in performance**

** After debates, the approach was abandoned

Communicative Approach

Time:
- Mid of 1980s,

Trend
- Canale & Swain's Communicative Competence

Emphasis
- Communicative tasks

Need
- The need for correspondence between language test performance and language use

Claim
- In order for a particular language test to be useful for its intended purpose, test performance must correspond in demonstrable ways to language use in non-test situation. (Backman & Palmer, 1996)

Problem
- Tasks tended to be artificial, contrived, and unlikely to mirror language use in real life.
- "Integrative tests such as a Cloze only tells about a candidate's linguistic competence, but nothing directly about a student's performance ability". (Weir, 1900)
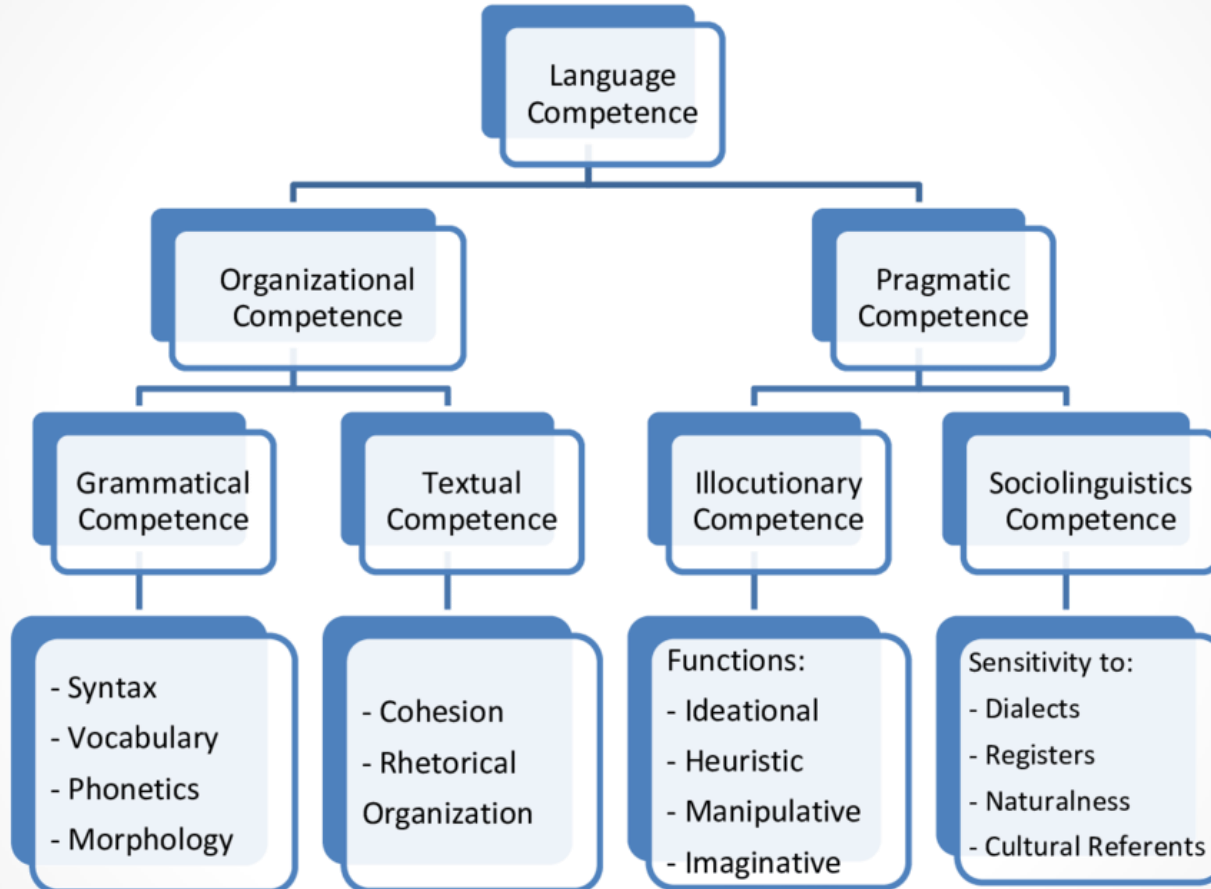
Quest
- Authenticity & communicative performance

Proposed Solution
- Bachman (1990) proposed a of language competence consisting of organizational and pragmatic competence, respectively subdivided into grammatical and textual components and into illocutionary and sociolinguistic components.

Components of Language Competence (Bachman, 1990)

Language Competence

- **Organizational Competence**
  - **Grammatical Competence**
    - Syntax
    - Vocabulary
    - Phonetics
    - Morphology
  - **Textual Competence**
    - Cohesion
    - Rhetorical Organization
- **Pragmatic Competence**
  - **Illocutionary Competence**
    - Functions:
      - Ideational
      - Heuristic
      - Manipulative
      - Imaginative
  - **Sociolinguistics Competence**
    - Sensitivity to:
      - Dialects
      - Registers
      - Naturalness
      - Cultural Referents

Communicative Approach

Bachman & Palmer's other emphasis

- **Strategic Competence**: (the ability to employ communicative strategies to compensate for breakdowns as well as enhance the rhetorical effect of utterances) in the process of communication.

- All elements of the model (especially pragmatic & strategic competences are included in the construct of language testing and in the actual performance of the test- taker.

Challenges

- Test designers face challenges in identifying real-world tasks which are extraordinarily varied to be performed by test-taker.

- Tasks need to be validated by what actually language users do with language.

- Weir (1990): "to measure language proficiency.. accounts must now be taken of: where, when, how, with whom, and why language is to be used, and on what topics, and with what effect".

Later emphasis

- Authenticity of tasks

- Genuineness of language.

Performance- Based Assessment (PBA)
(Task- Based Assessment)

Emphasis
- **Student- centered**

Tools
- **Oral production**
- **Written production**
- **Open- ended responses**
- **Integral performance (across skills)**
- **Group performance & Other interactive tasks**

Key features
- **Time consuming**
- **Expensive**
- **High content validity (because students are assessed as they perform actual or simulated real- world tasks/ the targeted linguistic acts)**

The majority of PBA involve:
- **Interactive tasks (hence called task-based assessment)**
- **Test-takers are assessed in the act of speaking, requesting, responding, or in combining listening & speaking, and integrating reading & writing.**
- **No paper & pencil tests.**

Example integrative assessment procedure
- **Oral interview (test- taker listens accurately to someone else and respond appropriately. Such tasks- if designed appropriately- can approach the authenticity of real life language use)**

Traditional & Alternative Assessment

- It is difficult to draw a clear line of distinction between traditional & alternative assessment.
- Many forms of assessment fall in between the two, and some combine the best of both.
- More time and higher budgets are required to administer and score assessments that presuppose more subjective evaluation

Traditional Assessment

- Standardized exams
- Timed, multiple-choice format
- Decontextualized test items
- Scores suffice for feedback
- Norm- referenced scores
- Focus on discrete answers
- Summative
- Oriented to product
- Non-interactive performance
- Fosters extrinsic motivation

Alternative Assessment

- Continuous long-term assessment
- Untimed, open-ended responses
- Contextualized communicative tasks
- Individualized feedback
- Criterion-referenced scores
- Open-ended, creative answers
- Formative
- Oriented to process
- Interactive performance
- Fosters intrinsic motivation

Reference

- **Brown, H. D. & Abeywickrama, P. (2012). Language Assessment: Principles & Classroom Practices. 2nd Ed. Pearson Education, USA.**