Characteristics of Good Reading and Listening Tests

Djumanazarova Ziyada Amangeldi qizi
*Tashkent Institute of Chemical Technology Assistant teacher of the "Foreign Languages"
department, ziyada.jumanazarova9828@gmail.com*

Abstract: Assessment is an essential component of every language acquisition process. It gives information on people's language abilities, which has significant implications for test takers and influences their academic and professional destiny. As a result, such high-stakes testing must be successful for test takers and all those involved that use the exam outcomes. Language tests are often of poor quality and do not correctly assess what they are designed to evaluate, according to testing literature. Several research studies have proven that test tasks impact test taker performance, prompting testing specialists to focus their efforts on improving the quality of test assignments. Several linguists suggested different task characteristics frameworks that contain certain sets of characteristics for reading tasks. By applying these frameworks, the current study investigated the characteristics of a good reading test task designed for summative assessment at language courses. To add to that, the paper analyses characteristics of listening task types and how they affect learners' performance.

Key words: language acquisition, assessment, summative assessment, reading, reading tasks, listening, listening tasks, task types, characteristics.

Introduction. Before discussing the characteristics of a good reading test task, we need a clear definition of **reading** so that we can determine what we must assess. According to Urquhart and Weir (1998), reading is **"the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print"** (p. 22). That is to say that the meaning is decoded and interpreted through the vocabulary items, the grammatical points and the structure of the text. Furthermore, Nunan (1991) defines reading as **a dynamic process "in which the text elements interact with other factors outside the text, in this case most particularly with the reader's knowledge of content of the text"** (p. 70). This means that comprehension is not only associated with the text content, but also with the student's reading proficiency.

Now we need to understand the nature of assessment itself. As we all know, there are 5 criteria for testing a test, which are the must features every assessment should possess. However, according to Pellegrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser (2001), there are three important components of effective assessment that is cognition, observation and interpretation. In the case of reading assessment, **cognition** pays attention to the strategies and skills used by test-takers to understand the text and construct meaning. The reader should be able to identify important information and neglect unimportant one within the text. To be more precise, tests should address the reader's cognitive abilities of constructing meaning and develop the reader's reading skills and strategies. In addition, he/she is expected to be able to analyze the content of the text and understand thoroughly. This component of reading assessment, first of all, reflects how successfully students use comprehension strategies as readers and secondly, represents the teacher's instruction (whether practical or not). Second component is **observation** which depicts the teacher's knowledge related to how reading tasks work. It, in turn, informs the teacher about how to assess the reading tasks that he/she thinks crucial for readers' success:

> ➢ Do reading tasks ask students to construct a summary not to choose the correct summary from multiple-choice questions?

> ➢ Does the assessment allow students to find different interpretation of the text or a single correct meaning?

> ➢ Does the assessment provide the mixture of formative and summative assessment formats?

> ➢ Do tasks ask students to retell the content or provide a detailed list of the content?

> ➢ Are tasks related to the types of tasks regularly done in the classroom?

The third component is **interpretation** which is related to acts of inference. That means that reading tests should enable the teacher to find out about the student's performance and skill growth as well as their needs and weaknesses.

However, there are different views about the criteria for good assessment. One of them is the **'CURRV' framework** proposed by Leipzig and Afflerbach (2000) which helps to examine a reading assessment using 5 criteria whether it is suitable for testing students' learning. It stands for **consequences (1), usefullnes (2), roles and responsibilites (3), reliability (4) and validity (5)** for assessing reading. These five components enable us to analyze different reading tests and make choices and suggestions depending on their strong and weak points. Below I try to give short and clear definitions for each one:

1. Consequences. All reading assessments have consequences which are either positive or negative. The utmost consequence aimed from reading assessment is to develop students' reading skills. However, some assessments are unable to represent such changes. With the help of high-quality reading tests students become better readers and as a result of teacher's corrective feedback, they are motivated to read more while low scores may harm students' motivation. The teacher modifies his classroom instructions based on the consequences of the assessment reflects. Evaluating reading assessments from 'consequences' point of view allows us to identify the suitability of tests.

2. Usefulness. This component helps us determine necessary assessments and those which are replaceable ones. Some reading tests are developed by teachers, some are available on the Internet while others continue existing from old times. Based on the 'usefullness' criteria, we can make decisions about which tests are essential and should be taken in the first place, which ones we can keep for later and which tests we had better not use.

3. Roles and responsibilites. According to this component, reading assessments should coincide with the related roles and responsibilites. For example, the teacher's role and responsibilty are to give instructions, to familiarize students with the test format and question types and accordingly, students' roles are to get prepared for the test and follow the teacher instruction.

4. Reliability. The theory behind realiability is that assessments reflect 2 components: one is the 'true component' which represents real achievement results of the test taker, the other is the 'error component' which shows the achievement results that are not reflected in the assessment. If the test is unreliable, the decisions the teacher makes about students' learning may be of no value. In that case, the teacher is deprived of recognizing students' needs and lacks.

5. Validity. A valid test of reading should evaluate students' reading ability. For example, if the teacher thinks that the achievement in reading is affected by motivation, he/she should apply for the reading assessments that increase readers' motivation.

Teachers and/or testers should impelement such kinds of texts which have the aforementioned characteristics as well as those which are in line with the course content, students' level and interests as the choice of the text is of great importance in designing a reading test.

Concerning listening tasks, there are a myraid of listening tasks for the listener to be able to understand different contexts and circumstances. One type of listening tasks is information transfer in which "aurally processed information must be transferred into a visual representation, such as labelling a diagram, identifying an element in a picture, completing a form or showing routes on a map" (Brown, 2004, p. 127). Reconstructing ideas from an oral form into a written text can be challenging for students, which improves students' listening skills and critical reflection. As this selective type of listening require students to make transformations from oral speech into different kinds of written forms such as a diagram, a map, etc., students can learn how to listen, analyze and organize the content of oral texts.

Moreover, the so-called type of tasks reflect authenticity since they make use of timetables, maps, charts and others the reader may encounter in a daily life. Moreover, Hughes (2016) stated that this technique can be as advantageous as it is used in reading because there is minimum need for productive skills from the part of the listener. However, some information transfer questions may require little analysis. As a result, the test-taker may find the correct answer with some logical reasoning. It sometimes happens that trick works well not only in listening but also in reading.

Another type is paraphrase recognition in which the test-taker is asked to choose the correct paraphrase from a number of choices (Brown, 2004). This intensive type of listening helps students to improve their ability to gather and understand information. In addition, it develops active listening and attention while absorbing information. Nevertheless, the listener may not benefit from the above mentioned advantages if he/she interprets too far ahead of what the speaker has said. As a result, the listener misunderstands or chooses the wrong answer as he/she does not let the speaker clarify the answer towards the end of the question.

Conclusion. Teachers and/or testers should impelement such kinds of test tasks which have the aforementioned characteristics as well as those which are in line with the course content, students' level and interests as the choice of the task is of great importance in designing reading and listening tests. If applied properly both by test-takers and testers, I think, all types of tasks whether be in listening or reading can be potentially beneficial for both sides.

References:

1. Brown, H. D. (2004). Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices. New York: Longman.

2. Hughes, Arthur. (2016). Testing listening. Cambridge University Press.

3. Leipzig, D. H., & Afflerbach, P. (2000). *Determining the suitability of assessments: Using the CURRV framework*. In L. Baker, M. J. Dreher, & J. T. Guthrie (Eds.), Engaging young readers: Promoting achievement and motivation (pp. 159–187). New York: Guilford.

4. Nunan, D. (1991). Language Teaching Methodology: A Textbook for Teachers. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall International.

5. Pellegrino, J. W., Chudowsky, N., & Glaser, R. (Eds.). (2001). Knowing what students know: The science and design of educational assessment. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

6. Urquhart, S., & Weir, C. (1998). Reading in a second Language: Process, Product, and Practice. London: Longman.