COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEST
FOR SPEAKING CLASS

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A. INTRODUCTION

According to Brown (2004:3) a test is a method of measuring a person's ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain. There are three components in that definition, method, knowledge and performance. It means that a test is a tool to measure someone's ability in performing a language. More over Savignon (1983:231) says that tests are commonly used to measure the outcome of instructional program. Tests may be used to guide the development of instructional programs. By doing a test the teacher might check the development of the programs that have been done to the students. From these two definition of test above we may say that test is a tool to evaluate students and also the instructional programs in school.

The performance of language test is influenced by many factors, one of those is communicative language ability. It consists of the ability to use language communicatively involves both knowledge of or competence in the language, and the capacity for implementing this competence. It should be implemented on all skills of English, such as writing, reading, speaking, and listening in all students level. This is the most important aspect in language test.

How is it said to be communicative test? The answer is the context and situation. All aspects of English skill should be taught based on situational context . Context is the

key how language in use. Therefore teacher should not test students in discrete way but integrated between text and context, knowledge and skill. The students should recognize the full context of language use, as Van Dijk (in Bachman:1990) states that delineation of the relationship between text and context, clearly recognize the context of discourse.

In university, speaking is one of pre-requisite courses that study about English skills. Each of them should pass this course before going up to other courses. Not only for speaking but for other English skill, they have to master the vocabulary and also the use of the language itself communicatively.

Students of Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (STAIN) Kerinci often spend so much time to answer oral questions. Even the lecturer gives them enough time to think and write the answer in the piece of paper, but they still have not got the ideas of the answer. Some students said that they did not know how to say it in English, some said that they have no confidence to say it. In speaking test, the teacher should apply the test communicatively since speaking is the skill which person to person interrelated to each other. Speaking communicatively while studying English is a good composition to get knowledge and skill, as in text and context. Therefore, this paper is going to describe how communicative language test applied in speaking 1 class which use oral test together with communicative context as well.

A. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

1. Language Competence

Developing communicative competence is one of the concepts of classroom techniques of teaching English and being applied in the test. Hymes and Gumpers (1972:VII) state that communicative competence means what a speaker needs to know to communicate

effectively in a culturally significant setting. More over Savignon (1983:9-24) supports the idea and discusses the four components of communicative competence which include grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence is the ability to recognize the lexical, morphological, syntactic and phonological features of language. sociolinguistic competence is the ability to understand the appropriate meaning in social and cultural contexts. Discourse competence is the ability to interpret the communication of a series of sentences or utterances to form a meaningful whole. Finally, strategic competence is the ability to use the strategies to compensate an imperfect communication such as doing repetition, avoidance, guessing, or shifts in register and style, in sustaining communication

In developing communicative competence, the test method should put more emphasis on the use rather than usage. Usage is one aspect of performance, that aspect which makes evident the aspect to which the language user demonstrates his knowledge of linguistic rules, while use is makes evident the extent to which the language user demonstrates his linguistic rules for effective communication.

2. The Nature of Speaking

If we have learned a language other than our own, we may feel that speaking in a new language is harder than reading, writing, or listening. There are may be caused by two reasons (Bayley in Nunan:2003):

a. Unlike reading or writing, speaking happens in real time, usually the person we are talking to is waiting for us to speak right then.

b. When you speak, you cannot edit and revise what you wish to say, as you can if you are writing.

In communicative language teaching students should learn through interacting, lessons should consist of opportunities to communicate In the target language. The same as in communicative language test, followed up of what students have got from the class the test should give opportunities to the students to be assessed by using contextual and situational test items, so that they can be tested naturally as if they are in a real life. Even in the speaking test, it should be emphasized that the test must be natural and situational.

3. Speaking Assessment

The objective of teaching spoken language is the development of the ability to interact successfully in that language, and that this involves comprehension as well as production. The same as its objective of assessing speaking ability, it should describe that students are able to interact successfully which also involves comprehension and production. According to Weir (1990:73) testing speaking ability offers plenty of scope for meeting the criteria for communicative testing, they are:

a. tasks developed within this paradigm should be purposive,

b. interesting, and motivating, with a washback effect on teaching that precedes the test;

c. interaction should be a key feature;

d. there should be a degree of intersubjectivity among participants

e. the output should be to a certain extent unpredictable

f. a realistic context should be provided

g. processing should be done in real time

From those criteria the test are expected to cover all recommended ones which is very useful to test students in order to have communicative language test.

4. Concept of validity and reliability in Oral Test

A test is said to be valid if it measures accurately what is intended to measure. According to Bachman (1990:274) in oral interview test of speaking, for example, the definition of communicative language ability includes the productive modality and oral channel, as does the definition of the response facet of the test method. In this case, these trait and method factors are inextricably bound together, making it impossible to distinguish between them, and hence to make a neat distinction between reliability and validity.

However Hughes (2002: 110) proposes that the scoring of oral test will be valid and reliable only if:

a. Clearly recognizable and appropriate descriptions of criteria levels are written and scorers are trained to use them

b. Irrelevant features of performance are ignored

c. There is more than one scorer for each performance.

Therefore, based on these criteria the oral test would be valid and reliable if the items of tests which are given to the students are relevant with items that have been studied in the classroom. While in the class they are trained to use such activities like question and answer activities with their friends, describing picture based on the book, and giving direction of using something. They are all communicative activities which scores are taken by the teachers.

B. PROCEDURES OF CONSTRUCTING THE COMMUNICATIVE TEST

In the communicative language test, there must be covered by some qualification:

1. should be interactive

2. Direct in nature with tasks reflecting realistic discourse processing activities

3. Texts and tasks should be relevant to the intended situation of the target population

4. Ability should be sampled within meaningful and developing context and

5. The test should be based on an explicit a priori specification

In order to pursue the communicative paradigm, tasks should, as far as possible, be included in the testing operation with due regard to their directness of fit with criteria which accurately and adequately describe the significant aspects of the target activities and the condition under which they are normally performed.

The starting point for testing within this paradigm is the specification of the general descriptive parameters of the target test population's context of situation, irrespective of differing views on the most appropriate methodology for doing so. These parameters are useful to the tester, as a checklist against which the appropriacy of performance based test task can be evaluated. If the intention is to simulate in the testing situation those events and component activities students are to be faced with in the real world then it id necessary to have a systematic basis for describing these. If a set of general descriptive parameters applicable to events in the target situation are established these can then be used to evaluate the degree of similarity between the test tasks and the activities candidates are involved in, or are likely to be involved in, in their real-world situations.

The parameters that it would be important to collect information on include:

a. Activities – the sub-tasks students have to cope with while participating in events

b. Setting – the physical and psycho-social contexts of the events

c. Interaction – the role set and social relationships candidates are involved in

d. Instrumentality – the medium, mode and channel of the activities within events

e. Dialect – the dialects and accents candidates are exposed to

F. Enabling skills – the underlying skills which appear to be necessary to enable students to operate in the various activities

ORAL LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT

In communicative test we should aim to provide the opportunity for what Widdowson (in Weir:1990) termed authentic language use, i.e. putting the learner in positions when 'he is required to deal with… genuine instances of language use' in a way that corresponds to 'his normal communicative activities'. More over according to O'Malley (1996:63) in preparing the oral assessment we need to prepare some aspects, they are:

1. Identifying Purpose

2. Planning for assessment

3. Developing rubrics and/or scoring procedures, setting standards, involving students in self- and peer assessment

4. Selecting assessment activities, and recording information

So based on these steps, the writer will try to apply them into speaking test done to English Students of STAIN Kerinci on the first year at Speaking 1 class so they can speak up confidently and fluently.

1. Identifying Purpose

The oral language of English language learners is typically assessed for one of three purposes:

a. For initial identification and placement of students in need of a

language-based program such as ESL or bilingual education

b. For movement from one level to another within a given program

c. For placement out of an ESL/bilingual program into a grade-level classroom.

Based on these three purposes, the speaking test done to first year students is purposing for movement from speaking 1 class to speaking 2 class. The test is the final examination, so the students are required to pass Speaking 1 class to continue taking Speaking 2 class since Speaking course is prerequisite courses. Besides that, the goals of Speaking 1 class is that by the end of Speaking class, students should be able to listen to native speakers and practice in carrying out many conversational functions. This class tries to convince students that learning to speak and understand English is not as difficult as you think, but, like any skill, it involves practice. This class lets students to practice in peer which give them as much conversational practice as is possible in classroom situation. since it is a communicative test the students should be free to speak naturally based on the context.

2. Planning for Assessment

Part of planning for assessment is deciding when to assess students individually and when to assess them in group. One important step in planning assessment is to outline the major instructional goals or learning outcomes and match these to learning activities and/or performance test. Another important part of planning for assessment is deciding how often to collect information. However, in this test since its purpose for movement so the test is only taken once but the score still considers to students' progress from the beginning to the end of the class.

However the following is the procedures to conduct the test (Hughes:2002)

a. The teacher makes the oral test as long as is feasible (as attached in Appendice 1)

b. The teacher select what she regards as a representative sample of the specified content.

c. The teacher plans the test carefully.

d. The teacher gives many 'fresh starts' as possible

e. The teacher select the students to be tested carefully. Two students are required to enter the test room for 8 minutes.

f. Carry out the test in a quiet room

g. The teacher collect enough information

h. The teacher does not talk too much unless giving questions and directions

3. Developing rubrics and/or scoring procedures

Students needs to know the purpose of the assessment activities, the expected performance, and the criteria for each task. Setting criteria is a crucial part of assessment. Without criteria of standards of performance, performance task remains simply a collection of instructional activities. Based on student performance teachers can revise assessment task and standards as well as instructional objectives and activities to better meet learners' need. Score rubrics are needed to check the dimensions or aspects of oral language, these might typically include communicative effect of general comprehensibility, grammar, and pronunciation. The rubrics will be shared with the students, so that they will get effort to do their best. In this test, the writer uses holistic scale rubrics adapted from a rating scale developed by ESL teachers Portfolio Assessment Group (O'Malley: 1996) to evaluate the students. the writer uses this since English is not the first language for the students, so it is suitable for first year students.

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Holistic Oral Language Scoring Rubric:

Rating	Description
6	a. Communicates competently in social and classroom settings b. Speaks fluently c. Masters a variety of grammatical structures d. Uses extensive vocabulary but may lag behind native-speaking peers e. Understands classroom discussion without difficulty
5	a. Speaks in social and classroom settings with sustained and connected discourse; any errors do not interfere with meaning b. Speaks with near-native fluency; any hesitations do not interfere with communication c. Uses a variety of structures with occasional grammatical errors d. Uses varied vocabulary e. Understands simple sentences in sustained conversation; requires repetition
4	a. Initiates and sustains a conversation with descriptors and details; exhibits self-confidence in social situations; begins to communicate in classroom settings b. Speaks with occasional hesitation c. Uses some complex sentences; applies rules of grammar but lacks control of irregular forms (e.g. runned, mans, not never, more higher) d. Uses adequate vocabulary; some word usage irregularities e. Understands classroom discussions with repetition, rephrasing, and clarification
3	a. Begins to initiate conversation; retells a story or experience; asks and responds to simple questions

	b. Speaks hesitate because of rephrasing and searching for words c. Uses predominantly present tense verbs; demonstrates errors of omission (leaves words out, word endings off) d. Uses limited vocabulary e. Understand simple sentences in sustained conversation; requires repetition
2	a. Begins to communicate personal and survival needs b. Speaks in single-word utterances and short patterns c. Uses functional vocabulary d. Understands words and phrases; requires repetition
1	a. Begins to name concrete objects b. Repeats words and phrases c. Understands little or no English.

The scoring procedures are following the holistic oral language rubrics above. Whatever the students do are considered and valued based on the rubrics above.

4. Selecting assessment activities, and recording information

The assessment activities should assess authentic language use in context, both communicative and academic language functions, and the ability to communicate meaning. It is more effective that the students are assessed based from their performance on the task. The students are required to do something in response to what they hear, whether it's taking notes, charting a route on a map, or answering questions. They should challenge the proficiency level of the students without frustrating them.

Since the students are the first year so it is possible to use combination between intensive and responsive speaking assessment task to test them, the responsive

speaking assessment involves students to give any responds towards:

a. Question and answer

The students are asked to answer the questions related to the students themselves such as their family, their hobbies, their towns, their schools and so on. this activities are done alone. The example of the questions are:

✓ Can you tell me about your family?

✓ Describe what you did last weekend?

✓ What is your favorite class and why?

✓ How does your town look like?

b. Giving instructions and directions

The students are asked to give instructions and directions. This activities are done in pair. The students are asked to give instruction to operate electronic tools, such as telephone, computer, television, radio, tape recorder, camera, and so on. The things are brought together with the teacher in the classroom. Then they should be able to give question and/or answer about the directions their partner asks. For example:

o How do we use this telephone?

o Can you tell me how to use this camera?

o I don't know how to use this computer, would you like to tell me?

c. Picture-cued descriptions of stories

The students are asked to describe the picture which is provided by the teacher in the classroom. The pictures may be very simple, designed to elicit a word or a phrase. It is used individually. According to O'Malley (1996: 79) picture cues require no prior preparations on the part of the student and can be used to elicit the following language functions:

describing, giving information , or giving an opinion. Pictures should be the real people rather than of cartoon characters in order to ensure appropriate interpretation.

C. CONCLUSION

A test is a tool to measure someone's ability in performing a language. The performance of language test is influenced by many factors, one of those is communicative language ability. It consists of the ability to use language communicatively involves both knowledge of or competence in the language, and the capacity for implementing this competence.

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