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ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES COURSE MODULE TESTS: ANY STANDARD TASKS?

The author raises the issue of standards elaborating for the components of modular tests in the English for Specific Purpose (ESP) course for Ukrainian universities. Based on Bologna Process documents, Common European Framework of References for Languages, and following the discussion initiated by leading professionals with regards to ESP skills assessment, it is emphasized the necessity for the inclusion into the module tests structure the tasks aiming at evaluation of all the language activities (namely, reading, listening, speaking, writing and use of English tasks). The analysis of respective resources on the problem demonstrates the big difference between declared by the officials requirements and every-day practice in some universities, where the modular tests remain a reflection of the teacher-centered methodology based on drilling. The serious work should be undertaken by all the tests stake-holders taking into account the experience of specially established structures for the quality assurance in western Europe (Great Britain, Sweden), and international council European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The idea of launching a project for the development of respective test specifications is suggested. The project should also involve the development of guidelines for item writers and sample test tasks, the piloting of the tasks as well as training raters of students' spoken and written performance, initiating in-service training courses for instructors of English to help them become aware of the demands of the new test format, and how best to prepare their students for such tests.

Key words: modular tests, English for specific purposes, language activity types, curriculum, standards.

Formulation of the problem. The issue of standard students' performance assessment is undermined by the appearance of Bologna process (BP) requirements to the countries-participants: the national credits (credit units) should be recognized in other European universities. In 2008 Ukraine became a government member of European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

Recent researches and publications analysis. Underlining the importance of «...the mechanism for effective and transparent academic quality assurance» programmed in BP, V.Bilokopytov assumes that EQAR acts independently from other organizations making consistent, fair and objective decisions [1:121]. With the «Common European Framework of References for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment» (CEFR) publication in 2001 the process of language skills evaluation standardizing had got the new basement and called to life lively discussions among both Ukrainian and foreign methodologists. Mostly approving the CEFR appearance they also outline the drawbacks and limitations of the criteria [4; 12; 17; 20].

Talking about the “education standards” in European context N.Remezovska proves «the curriculum contents standardization is considered by the scientists as an effective way of education level increasing, bringing it onto the new, high-quality grade of development» [7:161]. Following her, another Ukrainian researcher S.Leu claims that «professional training standardization issue for the national education and scientific space is not new» [6:181]. Evaluation and quality assurance systems in higher education in Great Britain and Sweden are in focus of S.Leu's and O.Tsyuk's attention respectively [6; 10].

The step ahead in adjusting appropriate assessment standards was made by agreeing on respective general framework for ESP Curriculum (the outcome of the project which was supported by British Council Ukraine). The Curriculum framework recommendations had been discussed at the conferences and seminars nationwide [4; 16; 18]. As T.Karpova (one of the developers of the

document) claimed: «Communication with university ESP teachers in the course of the national ESP Curriculum dissemination has revealed a range of concerns the language teachers have about an ESP module design, effective ESP teaching and learning, students' independent study, etc» [16:107]. She also raised the problem of designing «assessment system which will help us to make objective and reliable judgements about our students' progress» [16:112].

Promoting «the integrated development of language knowledge and skills» with «a variety of highly-motivating task-based and communication activities» S.Kostryska refers to «The University Standard for the ESP Discipline» elaborated by the National Mining University ESP professors. Implementing the results of the Curriculum baseline study, the authors describe modular tests as units for «summative control realization», though do not actually represent any detailed structure of these tests [8; 18].

The experience of our colleagues from Yaroslavl (RF) who suggest using testing Speaking as both formative (in the end of each unit) and summative assessment (as a final test) [2] appears to be coming back to the idea of constant «topics drilling». It seems that O.Demchenko voiced the arguments of many: «proved by other researchers tendency of automatic learning by heart while preparing for the tests» has resulted in Ukrainian graduates bad English language real-life performance [5:90]. Other common worries experienced while ESP skills testing by Ukrainian professionals (in particular, the need for clarification the criteria for assessment in class) are exposed by A.Teodorovych [19]. N.Sheverun also calls for refusing from assessment of «ready-made knowledge» methodology widely practiced in the past. She implies that «process of students' inspiration» should also be encouraged by all kinds of quality assurance [11:273]. The foreign professionals experience with regards to testing speaking is described by O.Gorbatenko. It is confirmed that in spite of culture differences, the evolution of foreign language speaking proficiency testing in many highly-developed countries deserves a thorough research [3]. While studying the importance of activity approach in the speaking tests development, O.Ukraiinska suggested 5 methodology principles for a standardized assessment system for testing speaking competence in higher education establishments: «the tests communicative orientation, the testees' individual characteristics, practicality, positive impact on the academic process, and modular-based consistency» [9]. However it is hard to disagree with H.D.Brown who notes that «in the era of communicative language teaching ... an overemphasis on fluency can sometimes lead to the decline of accuracy in speech» [13:140]. Describing the new norms for taking speaking tests as more real-life tasks Hungarian testers argue about the possibility of pairing the candidates in oral tests [15].

The article objective. Taking into account that studying a foreign language (and not only in a higher education establishment) has to develop all sorts of language activity, the module tests are expected to contain, Speaking, Reading, Listening, Writing and Use of English tasks. In real life though (and it is frequently even declared in academic programs) the structure of the tests usually lacks the parts aimed at assessing all these activities. The author tries to back up the promotion of differentiating the language activities appropriately by designing relevant and valid tests for scaling students' skills against the accepted criteria.

Listening tasks. CEFR introduces can-do statements for the assessment of listening skills and following the Ukrainian authorities' requirements for university graduates achievements in foreign language skills to be not lower than at B2 level, we suggest that the CEFR B2-C2 scales should be considered when adjusting to our the assessment of our students' listening skills [14:Table 2.26].

Other internationally recognized exams experiences: the tasks check comprehension of only authentic and out-of-textbooks materials, such as soundtracks from radio or TV shows, internet podcasts, etc. (this factor is also important for testing reading skills); the availability of the model (the example of the expected answer) prevents the students' misunderstanding before they perform the task. With simplification of administering listening through the multimedia usage another point of discussion which arises is the opportunity to listen to the text more than twice or just once (saving the time for other tasks).

Reading tasks. According to CEFR the basic principle for reading skills assessment is supposed to be the text type, which helps the testee to choose the approach to reading, the choice of strategy – consciously or subconsciously – while performing the task [14:Table 2.27].

It is also important that the tasks in reading part of the test would be directed at the assessment of different types of reading (scanning, skimming, search reading, reading for details, for a gist, etc.).

Use of English tasks. The main difference of these tasks from the reading ones is that they are not aimed at checking reading skills or strategies, therefore putting the task into the context which is comparatively easy for understanding, without any unknown words, if they are not directly tested. So the task implies reading and comprehension of the context, at the same time the context is supposed to be considerably easier than in Reading task, as it is not the text being the main part for testing, but a grammar structure, word form or lexical unit.

Writing tasks. Grading the students' writing skills and thus elaborating clear criteria seem to be the issue of eternal concern. The task formulation complexity (in fact, Reading and especially Use of English skills are also important while the performance) should be taken into account. For the provision of appropriate interpretation of the language skills level the respective recommendations are stated by CEFR [14:61].

The standardized Writing task format can be of great help for rating the task achievement. That is, for instance, the clear definition of two main parts widely used in the task itself: a rubric and a prompt that basically perform different functions. In some cases though they coincide, therefore becoming the combinations of instructions, and bringing additional problems for the rater.

Speaking tasks. As it has been mentioned, testing ESP speaking skills appears to be both the most challenging point for the discussion in methodological literature. We suggest that the well-known «presentation methodology» should be saved for the summative speaking assessment, where the audience (students) can actually help an instructor to assess the presenter. But how «to sit on two chairs» playing a role of both an interlocutor and rater while testing speaking at the modular control? Having more and more students with sufficient English-speaking background, the author tries to implement Western experience of pairing students for the interaction according to the instruction.

Let us take «Communication in the new era» topic for an example. The instructor addresses a pair of students: «Now I would like you to discuss a topic for 3-5 minutes. The task is to express your opinion about communication between young people. Consider following issues:

- the importance of communicating with peers and adults;
- using electronic media;
- slang and colloquial words used by young people
- changes in communication in future.

Cooperate with your partner».

By this task we suppose to examine the following abilities: the expression of a personal opinion, evaluation of another point of view, pointing out advantages and drawbacks, negotiating, making assumptions and conclusions, agreeing or disagreeing, suggestion and persuasion, etc. To avoid «individual long turns» or pauses during the discussion the testees have to be aware of the respective rules of proper behaviour.

Conclusions. Even superficial analysis of the methodological literature demonstrates the utmost importance of the coordination the efforts for at least structural agreement on modular tests tasks. The so-called «wash-back effect» of the test would motivate instructors and students to pay attention to all the kinds of language activities appropriately. We have a strong belief that suggested changes are to be encouraged under an agreement with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education. Our task is to gain experience in producing test specifications, guidelines for item writers and sample test tasks. The outcomes produced along the project (Reading, Writing, Listening, Use of English and Speaking tasks) are supposed to be tested on large samples of students similar to those who would take the tests in the future. The project would also plan to train raters of students' spoken and written performance, and develop in-service training courses for instructors of English, to help them

become aware of the demands of modern European tests of English, and how best to prepare their students for such tests. To support the test stake-holders (participants of the testing process, and other people concerned) the authorities have to publish the tasks developed and/or piloted, followed by appropriate recommendations.

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Теодорович Артемій. Тести для модульних контрольних робіт з англійської мови для спеціальних цілей: стандартні завдання?

Розглядається проблема стандартизації структури модульних контрольних робіт, що пропонуються студентам вишів під час вивчення курсу «Іноземна мова за професійним спрямуванням». Керуючись програмними документами Ради Європи та продовжуючи дискусію провідних вітчизняних та зарубіжних фахівців щодо оцінювання знань, умінь та навичок з англійської мови студентів-нефілологів, автор обґрунтовує необхідність включати до структури модульних робіт завдання, спрямовані на контроль усіх видів мовної діяльності. Коментуються вимоги до таких завдань, рекомендуються конкретні заходи щодо їхнього подальшого унормування.

Ключові слова: модульні контрольні роботи, англійська мова за професійним спрямуванням, завдання, види мовної діяльності, навчальна програма, стандарти.

Теодорович Артемій. Тесты для модульных контрольных работ с английского языка для специальных целей: стандартные задачи?

Рассматривается проблема стандартизации структуры модульных контрольных работ, предлагаемых студентам вузов, изучающих курс «Иностранный язык профессиональной направленности». Руководствуясь программными документами Совета Европы и продолжая дискуссию ведущих отечественных и зарубежных специалистов относительно оценивания знаний, умений и навыков по английскому языку студентов-нефилологов, автор обосновывает необходимость включать в структуру модульных работ задания, контролирующую все виды языковой деятельности. Комментируются требования к таким заданиям, рекомендуются конкретные мероприятия по их дальнейшей стандартизации.

Ключевые слова: модульные контрольные работы, английский язык профессиональной направленности, виды языковой деятельности, учебная программа, стандарты.