

Types of Test Items

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The questions on a test are called items. The word item is preferred because it does not imply the interrogative form. The most common types of items used in language classes are multiple-choice items, short answer items, and communication items.

1- Multiple-choice items :

Multiple-choice test items are designed to elicit responses from the students. Since there is only right answer, the scorer can very rapidly mark an item as correct or incorrect. More important, when a group of scorers is reading the same test paper, each of them arrives at the same score (This arrangement is called scorer reliability). The reliability of multiple-choice items and the increased use of electronic computers have led to widespread acceptance of machine-scored answer sheet. The items present the students with four or five options from which they must select the correct answer.

- Although the scorer reliability of these machine-scored multiple-choice tests is almost perfect, the validity of each test or each section of the test must be determined separately. Just because a test is 'objective', it is not automatically a good test. Before using any standardized objective test, the teacher should carefully go over the specifications to determine whether they correspond to his or her own reasons for giving the test.

a- The item :

In a multiple-choice item, the stem is the initial part: either a partial sentence to be completed, a question, or several statements leading to a question or incomplete phrase. The choices from which students must select their answers are known as options, responses, or alternatives. One response, the key, is distinctly correct or more suitable than the others. Incorrect responses are called distractors and should be worded that they seem attractive to the uninformed or poorly informed student. If a distractor is obviously wrong that is never selected, it plays no useful role in the item and should be eliminated or replaced by a new alternative.

b- Passage items :

Passage items, as the name suggests, are two or more items that refer to a single 'passage': a paragraph, a poem, a conversation, or a visual. The passage may be printed in the test booklet, recorded and played over a tape recorder, or projected on a screen. The items that accompany a linguistic passage evaluate how well the students understand what they have just read or heard. Effective passage items should be so constructed that an intelligent native speaker could not arrive at the correct answer without having read or heard the passage. In other words, students should not be able to answer passage items merely with common sense and a knowledge of the target language. Visual passage items consist of a group of items referring to a single picture, slide, or film. The meaning of the visual should be clear to the students, while the linguistic problems to be tested are found in the responses.

- c- Discrete Items :** Discrete items stand alone. The most common discrete are utterly independent of each other, and their order on a given test could be transposed without changing their effectiveness. To obtain greater economy in test administration, a series of discrete items employing identical options could be presented as a group. Here is an example in English, where the stem is understood.

- **** Indicate whether the following statements refer to past events or to present events. Mark your answer sheet as follows :

A= past, B= present.

- They sing beautifully.
- We came together.
- You went with my car.

Correct responses : B, A, A .

Discrete language items may also be developed around visual stimuli: drawings, a sequence of clock faces, overhead transparencies, and flash cards.

2- Short-answer Objective items :

An objective test item is any item for which there is a single predictable correct answer. Whereas the multiple-choice item format is most often selected for standardizing tests, the classroom teacher typically makes heavy use of short-answer-items. These items may require one-word answers, such as brief responses to questions (oral and written), or the filling in of missing elements. At other times, several words or full sentences may be required.

- Like multiple-choice items, the short-answer items may be classified as passage items (for example, questions on a reading) or discrete items. The stimulus may be printed, spoken, visual, or a combination of these presentations. In order to assure the objective nature of short-answer items, the teacher must prepare a scoring system in advance.

3- Communication items :

In tests of communicative competence, it is usually impossible to predict precisely how students will respond, for communication allows and indeed encourages creativity on the part of the students. Although one can develop objective items to evaluate listening and reading comprehension, tests of oral and written self-expression elicit free responses that must be scored subjectively.

- Communication items are not, therefore, as objective as multiple-choice or short-answer items. However, through the development of an appropriate scoring procedure, it is possible to evaluate student performance with a good degree of objectivity. If communication is one of the major goals of the foreign language course, teachers must give the students the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to communicate, even if such tests are not totally objectives.

General Testing Terminology

1- Test and Quiz :

- Both tests and quizzes play a role in the language classroom. The distinction between test and quiz is one of dimension and purpose rather than of item content.
- The test is announced in advance and covers a specific unit of instruction, be it part of a lesson or several lessons. In reviewing for a test, students pull together the work of several class periods. Classroom tests may be given every two or three weeks. Such tests may be constructed to last the entire class period; in this case, optimum learning efficiency requires the teacher to return and discuss the corrected test as soon as the class meets again.
- The essence of the quiz is brevity. In contrast to the test, it may be unannounced. Frequent quizzes encourage students to devote time regularly to their language study. Moreover, the quiz enables the teacher to acquaint students with types of items that will subsequently be used in tests.

2- Objective and subjective test items :

An objective item is one for which there is a specific correct response; therefore, whether the item is scored by one teacher or another, whether it is scored today or last week, it is always scored the same way (Multiple-choice items & fill-in the blank). A subjective item is one that does not have a single right answer (interview & short composition).

3- Speed and power tests :

On a speed test, the student works against time (typing & translation). On a power test, the student is given sufficient time to finish the test. Some students may not answer all the questions, but this is because they are unable to do so, not because they were rushed.

4- Formative and summative evaluation :

The formative test is given during the course instruction; its purpose is to show which aspects of the chapter the student has mastered and where remedial work is necessary. The formative test is normally graded on a pass-fail basis, and students who fail are given the opportunity to study and then take the test again. The summative test, on the other hand, is usually given at the end of a marking period and measures the 'sum' total of the material covered.

5- Norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests :

The norm-referenced test compares a student's performance against the performance of other students (Curve). The criterion-referenced test indicates whether the student has met predetermined objective or criteria.

6- Discrete-point and global testing :

Discrete-point tests measure whether or not the student has mastered specific elements of the second language. Global language tests measure the student's ability to understand and use language in context.

7- Pure vs. hybrid test items :

On a pure test item, the student uses only one skill. In hybrid test item, two or more skills are used.

8- Pre-testing and post-testing :

The pre-test is given prior to teaching a course or a unit of instruction. It is similar in form and content of the post-test that is given at the end of the course or the unit.

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