ASSESSMENT: ITS ROLE FOR FUTURE TEACHERS

Victoria MASCALIUC,
Alecu Russo State University of Bălţi

Rezumat: Articolul în cauză se axează pe procesul de evaluare. Evaluarea este un proces foarte important în devenirea tînărului specialist. În limba engleză se vehiculează cu doi termeni foarte apropiaţi la înţeles. Cf. Evaluation, assessment. Ambii termeni sînt folosiţi cu mare succes. Evaluation, totuşi, este mai larg, pentru că redă procesul de comparare a cunoştinţelor într-un grup, ,,assessment" are legătură cu controlul cunoştinţelor în dependenţă de nişte criterii. Evaluarea e foarte importantă şi necesară pentru viitorul specialist.

Cuvinte-cheie: profesor, cunoştinţe, evaluare, ,,assessment", ,,evaluation", compararea cunoştinţelor, evaluare în grup, criterii de evaluare, tînărul specialist, limba engleză.

Abstract: The process of education is a very difficult one. It consists of many elements. Today a good teacher is a good psychologist, a knowledgeable and a polite person and a. All these features are still not enough today. A good teacher should be a good evaluator. The evaluation is the final and one of the most important criterions that is necessary to add to the image of a good teacher.

Key-words: a teacher, knowledge, assessment, evaluation, comparing knowledge, group evaluation, evaluation criteria, a young teacher, English.

The process of education is a very difficult one. It consists of many elements. Today a good teacher is a knowledgeable person, a polite person and a good psychologist. All these features are still not enough today. A good teacher should be a *good evaluator. The* evaluation is the final and one of the most important criterions that is necessary to add to the image of a good teacher.

There are many sphere of life where the assessment is used. *Educational assessment* is the process of documenting, usually in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, beliefs Assessment can focus on the individual learner, the learning community (class, workshop, or other organized group of learners), the institution, or the educational system as a whole. It is important to notice that the final purposes and assessment practices in education depends on the *theoretical framework* of the practitioners and researchers, their assumptions and beliefs about the nature of human mind, the origin of knowledge and the process of learning. This is an explanation given by the Wikipedia, but it seems so difficult to understand. That is why we looked at the origin of the word and observed that it comes from the verb *to assess* [1, p. 96].

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary the word *assessment* comes from the root word *assess* which is defined as:
1. to determine the rate or amount of (as a tax)
2. to impose (as a tax) according to an established rate b: to subject to a tax, charge, or levy
3. to make an official valuation of (property) for the purposes of taxation
4. to determine the importance, size, or value of (assess a problem)
5. to charge (a player or team) with a foul or penalty

Thus we can see that assessment in education is best described as an action "to determine the importance, size, or value of.

Thus Scott Thornbury says that term *assessment* is generally used to refer to all activities teachers use to help students learn and to gauge student progress [2, p. 34]. Though the notion of assessment is generally more complicated and is used in many spheres of our life, assessment is often divided for the sake of convenience using the following distinctions:
1. formative and summative
2. objective and subjective
3. informal and formal.

The classification of the assessment into formative and summative is made taken into consideration the objectives the teacher throws light on.
- Summative assessment is generally carried out at the end of a course or project. In an educational setting, summative assessments are typically used to assign students a course grade. Summative assessments are evaluative.
- Formative assessment is generally carried out throughout a course or project. Formative assessment, also referred to as "educative assessment," is used to aid learning. Formative assessments are diagnostic.

Educational researcher Robert Stake works a lot on the principles and criteria of assessment in general and he explains the difference between formative and summative assessment with the following analogy [3, p. 58].

When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative. When the guests taste the soup, that's summative.

Summative and formative assessments are often referred to in a learning context as *assessment of learning* and *assessment for learning* respectively. A common form of formative assessment is *diagnostic assessment*. Diagnostic assessment measures a student's current

knowledge and skills for the purpose of identifying a suitable program of learning. *Self-assessment* is a form of diagnostic assessment which involves students assessing themselves [5].

The second classification refers to the human factor. The process of assessing implies the subject (the teacher) that is the performer, the process of assessment and the object (the student). The teacher's task is to choose such exercises that will reduce the subjectivity from the process of assessment.

Assessment (either summative or formative) is often categorized as either objective or subjective. Objective assessment is a form of questioning which has a single correct answer. Subjective assessment is a form of questioning which may have more than one correct answer (or more than one way of expressing the correct answer). There are various types of objective and subjective questions. Objective question types include true/false answers, multiple-response and matching questions. Subjective questions include extended-response questions and essays. Objective assessment is well suited to the increasingly popular computerized or online assessment format.

Today there are two terms that are used in methodology evaluation and assessment. Many people mix them up. I would like to present the definitions of these terms that will clarify the situation: *assessment* is the action of assessing someone or something; *evaluation* is to judge or calculate the quality, importance, amount or value of something [6].

Thus it is quiet difficult to observe the difference, as the explanations coincide in many dictionaries. Still evaluation is a much more general term as it is to compare test scores of individuals and groups to selected norms.

As I have mentioned above assessment is a general term that can be used in evaluating different knowledge. Generally grammar is tested by means of discrete item tests that are based on the principles of grammar. Thus the tests that the teachers generally use are easy to test and easy to make, they are practical (progress, placement, achievement tests). They meet the learner's expectations, it is face validity that they have. They also fulfill another criterion of test effectiveness in that they are reliable. They are also valid tests, if we want is testing learner's knowledge in a specific area only. Apart from anything else they will motivate the student to revise the material. They have a positive spin-off. Still these tests lack something. It is impossible to check the communication abilities of the student. Scott Thurnbury proposes to use performance tests. This is the equivalent of the driving test. He says the student should show how well he can drive in the language. It is practical and at the same time impractical. We cannot send the student to a restaurant to test the communication ability. This kind of work is more effective than the others as it has a backwash effect. This means that as much classroom time will be spent on communication as on grammar. If we are going to take to analyze different types of tests, we will see that they do not satisfy all the grammatical expectations. *The fill-in tests* are effective in testing overall linguistic competence, but as they capture a great variety of items, it tests a wide range of competences; they seem to work better as placement tests. Still, these both tests are mainly form-focused than meaning-focused. *The grammar interpretation test* tests the learner's understanding of the items. It is not a productive test as it works on the level of recognition. *The Complete sentences tests* and write tests offer a degree of freedom to the students. But they reduce the effectiveness of the test as a discrete item. The first requires the student to exercise a little imagination. The second provides a more natural context, but it will favor students who are already good writers. Generally, these tests test bits of grammar in isolation, without testing whether these isolated bits have integrated into a functioning system [2, p. 54].

This suggests that if the discrete-item test is modeled on practice activities, then performance tests on the repertoire of classroom production activities. Moreover role play, simulations may provide useful test tasks. Thus the oral test must be a true assessment of spoken abilities, rather than an indication of how well a student can read a passage in English, or can produce well-memorized responses that have little meaning for him/her.

The main problem is to decide on the criteria of assessment. Scott Thornbury gives an example of an oral performance test. The teacher has been working with a lower intermediate class on the language of description of the places, using present perfect. There are some steps that the teacher should undertake:

- Prepare a double picture (picture where there is identical information with little changes)
- Divide the class in many groups (each group consists of two people)
- Prepare two rooms (one for a student, the other for the second student)
- Call the first student and give picture A
- Call the second student and give picture B
- Make the students speak on the pictures
- Make the students ask on the colleague's picture
  The assessment criteria are the following [2, pp. 146-148].
- Fluency (including fluidity of speech and ability to interact):

hesitant				fluid
1	2	3	4	5

- Complexity (Vocabulary range):

Limited vocabulary				Extensive vocabulary
1	2	3	4	5

- Accuracy:

Highly accented				Slightly accented
1	2	3	4	5
Inaccurate grammar				Accurate grammar
1	2	3	4	5

If we are going to analyze this performance test from the point of view of the principles, then we can observe that this type of test has a positive backwash effect. It is a valid test, as the teacher's aim is to develop the communicative competence. Still, the things are not as happy as that, as some problems raise related to reliability and face validity. Touching upon the first principle, more detailed descriptions are needed for each for each criterion. Moreover the students may think that their performance depended on the partner. Even if all these problems are ironed out, there is still the question of practicality. It is much more difficult to set up, administer and score than the discrete-item test.

By way of conclusion I can say that assessment is a difficult process as it requires time and abilities. One of the teacher's primary tasks is to create an atmosphere that will help the student to overpass this kind of stress. Thus I really believe that today a good teacher is a knowledgeable person and moreover a person can assess the students even without their understanding of it.

Bibliography:
1. Thornbury, S. *About Language: Tasks for Teachers of English*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 89-120.
2. Thornbury, S. *How to Teach Grammar,* Pearson Longman, 1999, p. 182.
3. Yule, G. *Analyzing English Grammar*, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 234.
4. Crystall, D. *Rediscover Grammar,* Addison Winsley Longman, 1988, pp. 70-106.
5. www.wikepedia.com
6. www.webster.com