"My Elbow is the Same As Your Elbow": From Grammatical Structure to Communication in Classroom Assessment

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Abstract

This paper explores the possibilities and challenges in testing grammar forms communicatively. Using an actual case of a beginning-level class of nglish as a ! econd "anguage# it outlines the steps of and considers issues in designing a grammar test on comparison constructions while attempting to maintain communicativeness and authenticity.

Introduction

$s a language teacher and language learner# % am well aware of the importance of communicative language teaching. &hen teaching grammar classes# % try to show students that grammar has relevance in everyday interactions by showing the usage of specific grammar structures in real-life situations. However# when it comes to testing grammar# % usually fall bac' on old-fashioned multiple-choice or gap-filling tests that are li'ely to be high in reliability and practicality. (y situation is described by Purpura)*++, -# who observed that many teachers put a lot of effort into teaching grammar communicatively# focusing on form and meaning. however# for testing# /they rely exclusively on traditional multiple-choice or blan'-completion tas's of grammatical form0)p. *1-. 2rom my own experience# this approach to testing grammar is inade3uate# as students who usually perform very well on these traditional tests still fail to produce the tested form correctly when spea'ing in real-life communication. 2or example# the class average of a recent assessment % administered targeting present and past tense structures was 4+5. however# when students communicated# they still produced sentences such as "! he go#0 /6esterday % go#0 and /% study last night.0 (ultiple-choice tests can be highly reliable# especially if they contain a sufficient number of items. yet# performance on the test might not be a valid measure of students7 ability to use the target structures proficiently in real-life communicative contexts)$nderson# 8lapham# 9 &all# 144:# p. 1;<-. Therefore# % was excited by the opportunity to collaborate with my colleagues to design an assessment to measure students7 abilities to use target grammatical structures while performing an authentic spea'ing tas'. This way# % could determine not only whether students 'now the grammatical rules and structures but also whether

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students could proﬁciently use the target structures in authentic communicative contexts. Below, % will describe the assessment itself, discuss the challenges we faced, and reﬂect on how these challenges may be addressed in the future.

Assessment Objectives

The purpose of this test was to ﬁnd out whether students could accurately produce simple structures for comparisons using the same as, similar to, diﬀerent from, like, and alike. These structures are from Basic English Grammar)\$Far, 144: ﬀ sections 1G-G and 1G-: of chapter 1G)pp. , <+-, <, -.

The test was created for a 1*-week High Beginner Grammar class that met for two hours each class day. The class used the Basic English Grammar)\$Far, 144: - textbook, supplemented with some materials for communicative purposes. The students7 proﬁciency level was approximately e3uivalent to the \$* level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

comes to production in communication# students may choose among many forms to express a given function# which means that in order to elicit a sample of the target grammatical forms# we need to restrict students‖ freedom in their choice of forms. $s we discovered during the test administration# by forcing students to use the assigned language form# we sacrifced the communicative part of the tas' as well as the tas' 7s authenticity.

Decause of the constraints of a grammar-driven syllabus# our group felt obliged to design and restrict the test to particular grammar forms that the students were learning that wee'. ! tudents7 tas' for the assessment was to compare mundane obJects using these exact G structures? the same as, similar to, di erent rom, like and alike✓‰n our attempt to achieve some authenticity

rather# they waited patiently for each other7s turn to end before initiating their turn. (ost sentences that the students produced were predictable)/(y boo' is the same as your boo'#0 /(y phone is similar to your phone#0 /(y pen is li' e your pen0-# which is not always the case in a real conversation. %nteractiveness that contributes to the accomplishment of a tas' is one aspect of a good spea' ing assessment)Dachman 9 Palmer# *++4# p. *G-. % noticed the lac' of interaction during the administration of the assessment# as some students ' ept their eyes on the whiteboard to ma' e sure they were using all the assigned forms instead of interacting with their group members.

%est Structure ! s$ Student Creati! ity
Puring the test# the students compared their own and their partners7 obJects# which allowed them

non-test language use0)p. @+1-. "i'ewise# Dachman and Palmer)*++4- stated that authenticity and the relevance to target language use of the test content and tas' may help promote test ta'ers7 positive and affective response to the tas'# which in turn may lead students to perform their best)p. *,-. The authors maintained that learners7 performance on the language test need
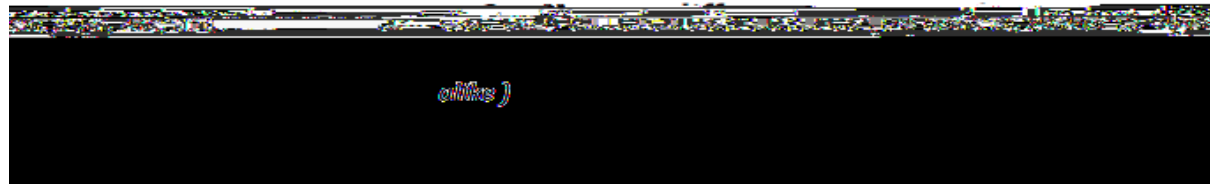
A&&endi* A

%est Instructions
%nstructions on (arch :

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Test instructions written on the whiteboard for the students

1. Look at all the objects in front of yo

2. Choose one and compare it to your object

About the Author:

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