# TEACHERS' TECHNIQUES AND STEPS IN ASSESSING

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## ABSTRACT

Traditionally, language has been defined as a tool for communication. But people can also communicate a message using body language, eye contact or some facial expression. Although this is true, still language is primarily regarded as the core of communication. Learning and understanding a language does not include only knowledge of grammar, lexis and phonology, but also certain features and characteristics of the culture. Language cannot and does not exist apart from culture. If language is taught without simultaneously teaching the culture in which it functions, meaningless symbols are taught or just symbols to which the learner attaches the wrong meaning.

**Keywords:** techniques, assessment, knowledge, language, teachers

## INTRODUCTION

Teachers' assessment techniques are an important part of judging the capabilities, progress and development of students. Assessment techniques help teachers judge how much a student knows at the beginning of a school year, semester or subject. Assessment techniques also help track progress and inform the teacher when the subject matter has been adequately learned by the students. They come in various forms:

- Homework
- Tests
- Interviews
- Oral Reports
- Papers
- Teacher's Observation

They can be:

- Formative
- Summative
- Objective
- Subjective

### Formative Assessment

Formative assessment techniques are used to evaluate a student at the beginning or middle of a class, semester or subject. Placement tests, interviews and teacher observation and feedback are examples of formative assessment techniques. Formative assessment techniques are designed to help a teacher understand a student's progress. Formative assessment techniques

are not graded. They are intended solely to guide a student to mastery of the given topic or subject and inform the teacher where he or she needs the student to focus.

Summative Assessment

Summative assessment techniques are used to gauge the outcome of the learning process. They focus on the curriculum presented during the learning unit and are used to find out whether or not a student was effectively taught a particular subject. A graded test, final exam, quiz, thesis paper and midterm exam are all examples of summative teachers' assessment techniques. Summative techniques should be designed to reflect the information given in the course. Unlike formative techniques, they are designed to reveal what already has been learned during the course of a particular educational unit. Only summative assessment tools should be graded.

### Objective Assessment

Teacher's assessment techniques, whether formative or summative, can be further divided into two other categories: objective and subjective. Objective assessment techniques have a clearly defined right and wrong answer. They are used to assess a student's knowledge of particular facts and figures that are universal. Examples of objective assessment techniques are true/false and multiple-choice questions. Objective assessment techniques are the easiest to design and grade and, therefore, are the more common type of assessment.

Subjective Assessment

Subjective assessment techniques require a little more creativity and opinion on the part of the student. These are questions, papers or tests that rely on the presentation of arguable material. Essay questions, research papers and argumentative speeches are examples of subjective assessment techniques. They can often reveal more than an objective assessment technique because they allow for more than just memorization on the part of the student. The student's tastes, personality and approach to education can more effectively be observed with subjective assessment techniques. Objective and subjective teachers' assessment techniques often are used in conjunction, such as a test that has a section of true/false questions and then an essay question at the end.

When to assess?

**Before starting** to teach, it may be important to get information based on the students' experiences and backgrounds. Self-assessment (culture-log) and a self-assessment profile (profile diagram) are the two techniques of assessment which can be used as a pre-test to students. When going on to a new teaching unit, a survey to assess attitudes on a particular theme can reveal students' perceptions.

**During the learning experience**, the teacher's observation in reference to specific criteria specified in a grid and gathering work from discussions and productions in the student's portfolio are appropriate techniques for  assessment.

**At the end of a unit or learning sequence,** the teacher may need to know the different types of knowledge acquired by students. Any indirect testing method is possible using multiple choice

items, matching items or short answers items. To evaluate "know-how/savoir-faire", we need to develop tasks to be performed by students. Simulations and role plays based on critical incidents would reveal the students' perceptions mostly when they interact in pairs or in groups of three or four.

**At the end of the course,** the same methods used at the end of a unit or learning sequence can be repeated in terms of "knowledge/savoirs" and "know-how/savoir-faire". For "being/savoir-être", the measures used before starting teaching can be repeated as a post-test, that is, teachers can use self assessment (culture-log), self-profile (profile diagram) and the portfolio as reflective devices.

### What to assess?

To answer this question, the teacher needs to identify the learning outcomes; those specified as learning outcomes for the course or as defined in the textbook, and those defined at the beginning of each unit or learning sequence. They should cover the three dimensions of intercultural communicative competence: knowledge, know-how and being. They should also take into consideration the learning process and progress.

How to assess?

Each dimension of intercultural communicative competence covers different aspects of learning. Consequently, the methods of assessment will vary accordingly in order to evaluate the students as efficiently as possible.

- "Knowledge" uses indirect testing procedures.
- "Know-how" is based on tasks.
- "Being" relies on self-assessment, surveys on attitudes, teacher's grids and the student's portfolio.

### Before starting to teach

Teachers can use two ways of gathering information on students' intercultural communicative competence profile before they engage into specific teaching activities. The two instruments - the culture log and the profile diagram - are based on students' self-assessment of their "Knowledge/savoirs" and "Being/savoir-être". Teachers can use them as pre-testing procedures. For the "Know-how/savoir-faire", it is important to explain to the students the content and the use of the portfolio as a tool to help them grow as a person and become aware of changes in their intercultural communicative competence.

The "culture log" is a "journal de bord" in which the student records his thoughts and the acquired learning or facts on the target language and culture at regular intervals (before starting to teach, during the process of learning and at the end of the course) to keep track of his or her progress in intercultural knowledge, skills (know-how) and attitudes (being). It is a precious technique for the learner and the teacher to get valuable insights because it shows how students progress in their learning and if a change in their behaviours and attitudes, positive or negative, occurs as a result of the teaching/learning process. The "profile-diagram"

refers to the self-assessment of attitudes (being). It could also be considered as a pre- and post-testing procedure. Both instruments can become the first record in the students' portfolio.

## Self-assessment of cultural knowledge and perceptions: Culture log

The teacher can hand such a log to students at the beginning of the semester/year of study, to see their initial level of knowledge in a target culture; students can produce 'c-logs' for each target culture and they are instructed to add information to their logs during the semester, with the final task of evaluating, at end of the semester/year of study, their progress and change in attitudes and perception of the target culture. This self-assessment is the first item to be integrated in the portfolio. It will help the students to build on and follow their progress in terms of the development of the three dimensions of intercultural communicative competence.

## Use of the portfolio

The Portfolio of Intercultural Communicative Competence as presented by the Council of Europe focuses on three dimensions which can be easily adapted when assessing students' intercultural communicative competence.

The portfolio not only explains who the students are and want to become but also reveals how they got to the point where they are at the end of their learning. It is about experiences that confirm their knowledge, behaviours, attitudes and perceptions on intercultural communicative competence. Growing through the pages of their portfolio should help the students to grow as a person and become aware of changes in their intercultural communicative competence. It could include:

1. A Language Passport - which represents a record of the student's skills in different languages and it is based on the reference levels of the Common European Framework. The passport records not only language competences, but also intercultural learning experiences, including details about different partial and specific competences. It can be used for self-assessment, teacher assessment or institutional assessment. The information in the passport must include details about time, place and person who recorded the entries.

2. A biography of students' which intercultural communicative competence can describe their intercultural background by means of a survey or self-assessment. It would reflect on how students see themselves in intercultural situations and record actual and past experiences as positive or negative. It has the benefit to promote self-awareness and motivate the learner, as the assessee, to take responsibility for his or her own progress. It may include personal history, cultural background, human life style, societal systems, religious influences, intercultural and linguistic experiences. It could recall intercultural contexts and aspects of different cultures difficult to adjust with, etc.

3. A dossier of evidence of intercultural competence which is possible by gathering any tangible evidence of the assessee's intercultural communicative competence. It could contain statements from formal assessment sessions and continuous self-assessment. Audio or video recordings of the assessee interacting effectively in intercultural situations would be of help to follow the progress of a student. It could include personal observations regarding language and culture and reflexive thinking to demonstrate students' progress as timeline.

The portfolio enables students to keep records of, and reflect on, experiences that have contributed to their progress. It would also enable them to store in an organized way, any pieces of evidence to support the levels of competence recorded. It provides a continuous internal assessment of performance based on the three dimensions taken into account in the teaching of intercultural communicative competence: "knowledge", "know-how" and "being".

In terms of "knowledge" it could reflect knowledge linked to collective memory, socio-cultural context and the diversity in ways of living. It could provide sources that contribute to learning cultural facts (music, arts, architecture, etc.) and day-life situations of the target language. It could reflect culture as history and geography of a civilization (culture with capital "C") linked to the anthropological approach (culture with no capital "c").

In terms of "know-how", it could reflect students' performance in real life situations: how they function in different contexts, in plurilingual/pluricultural practices such as exchange programs, how they adjust to different cultural environment and how they interact in the target language and culture.

In terms of "being", which is considered as the existential and affective domains, it reflects cultural awareness, critical appropriation of other cultures and identity, and transcultural valorisation of others. These different attitudes bring students to understanding, accepting and integrating the target culture and to internalizing, when given time, new values.

After teaching

There are three assessment techniques that can be used as pre-testing procedures: Self-assessment (Culture log), Self assessment (Profile diagram) and the Portfolio. The same tasks can also be used as post-testing procedures. The final task of assessing, at end of the semester/year of study, aims at assessing the students' progress and change in attitudes and perception of the target culture.

## Assessing intercultural "Knowledge/ Savoirs"

There are different levels of complexity that can vary in reference to the levels of learning (with beginners, intermediate or advanced students) when assessing knowledge. Therefore, most of the following examples present complexity in the assessment task in order to cover the three levels of competence (low, medium and high).

The following classification can be used to assess written or oral comprehension skills according to the different levels of complexity of the tasks.

1) To identify and describe explicit knowledge  (ex:Who is doing what, where, when and why)

2) To regroup / to reorganize (ex: In the following text, group into one column words which express ........ to the other culture and into another column words which express .......... between the two cultures).

3 To compare (ex: Read the three following short texts and find three elements that distinguish 'theme' in 'country' and 'country').

4) To infer / implicit knowledge (What relationship exists between the ........groups in the text you've just read).

5) To appreciate (Refer to the text you've just read and answer in writing what their  feelings are about the theme. According to you, why do they feel like that?)

6) To make a synthesis (Read the following text and propose an alternative to the reaction of .......... concerning .............).

7) To evaluate (Read the text and defend the reaction of ...........after being harassed by ............... on his behavior in public).

## Assessing intercultural "know-how / savoir-faire"

There are different levels of complexity that can vary in reference to the levels of learning (with beginners, intermediate or advanced students) when assessing intercultural skills (knowing-how/ savoir-faire). Therefore, most of the following five examples present degrees of complexity in the assessment task in order to cover the three levels of competence (low, medium and high). The following classification can be used when assessing written or oral comprehension skills according to the different levels of complexity of the tasks.

1.  To respond to events linguistically correctly but in a socially inappropriate manner.
2.  To adapt to events in response to input from  the interlocutors.
3.  To look for input and react appropriately in social encounters.
4.  To act using correct verbal and non-verbal behaviours.
5.  To interact successfully using different strategies.
6.  To take into account the sociocultural context and the interlocutors.
7.  To cope with misunderstandings and conflict-ridden situations.

Some of the techniques that can be used to assess the know-how / savoir-faire of students are:

*   Role-Playing,
*   Simulations,
*   Case Studies
*   Problem-Solving

The following five tasks take into account the above classification.

During the role playing, the teacher/assessor observes and may take notes on the linguistic appropriateness of the message with the social interactions in order to find out if learners adjust or not their responses to the input of the interlocutors (low intercultural level);  if they take the initiative and if the interactions and answers to the input progress in a satisfactory manner by using different strategies (medium intercultural level);  and if students use correct verbal and non-verbal behaviours, taking into account the socio-cultural context and the interlocutors' culture and if they finally untangle their misunderstandings (high intercultural level).

This task can also be used to assess intercultural 'being' because the teacher/assessor can observe the attitudes of the learners at the same time. To the language and linguistic aspects observed when assessing the skills 'know-how/savoir-faire', it is possible to add the following criteria:  understanding of new beliefs and values and tolerance of the other culture (low intercultural level); acceptance of new beliefs and values, openness, being able to compare his own beliefs and values with those of the other culture (medium intercultural level); integration of new beliefs and values, showing empathy, mediating  misunderstandings and being able to justify different beliefs and values (high intercultural level).

## Assessing intercultural "being / savoir-être"

The assessment of 'Being/savoir-être' relies on three sub-dimensions (cultural awareness, critical awareness and transcultural internalization of values). The following examples take into account all sub-dimensions of the domain.

The following classification can be used in written or oral comprehension according to the different levels of complexity of the tasks.

1. To understand and be able to describe new beliefs, attitudes and values that differ from those favoured in one's own culture.
2. To be tolerant of others and other cultures.
3. To accept other beliefs and values.
4. To be open-minded, being able to compare and contrast own beliefs and values with your own.
5. To respect others and other cultures.
6. To change personal views.
7. To demonstrate empathy and not only tolerance and sympathy.
8. To manage misunderstanding, tensions and conflicts.
9. To integrate new beliefs and values.
10. To be able to justify other beliefs and values.

Assessors can use pictures, posters or illustrations representing something that could be in conflict with values shared by people who do not come from the same culture. They can lead oral discussions or ask students to write essays or give their evaluation of a specific ambiguous situation.

Intercultural communicative competence, mostly the dimension of 'being/savoir-être' cannot be properly assessed using traditional testing procedures, and grading students with a mark or a score as the result of a measure or different measures. Alternative techniques of assessment, such as: pre- and post-course surveys, students' self-evaluation, the teacher's observation with grids of the learning process and progress, the teacher's evaluation and the student's portfolio, can provide more useful information.

For all these reasons, the final appraisal of intercultural communicative competence, can vary according to each of the three dimensions of intercultural communicative competence. Types of items such as multiple-choice, matching statements are still useful when assessing "knowledge/savoirs". For "know-how/savoir-faire", techniques such as role-plays and simulations of critical incidents, where students can interact as if in real life situations, are still appropriate items to be used. "Knowledge/savoirs" can also be integrated into "knowing-how/savoir-faire" which will be graded in terms of proficiency. For "being/savoir-être", self-assessment by means of surveys on attitudes, culture-logs, portfolios, reflective thinking and the teacher's observation using grids and profiles of performance are recommended. Its assessment should rely more on an "appreciation". It is defined as a process which intends to give an estimation of learning and to reflect students' levels of competence and proficiency based on intercultural competence descriptors and criteria.

In this context, summative assessment is less feasible because the intent is not to sum up attainment at the end of a course with a grade.

## CONCLUSION

The domain of intercultural communicative competence assessment should be dealt with cautiousness. Because culture is a mediating factor that is not easily defined or understood, there can be a large part of subjectivity in its teaching and even more in its assessment. It is like approaching a field of research not well defined. What is culture? What components can be assessed? Is everything to be assessed? There are so many questions that still have to be clarified and have not been addressed yet.

Furthermore, world-wide communication and the new development of technologies have created a "transnational culture". We already know that people use words differently in different countries. There are more and more misunderstandings of the meaning of the same word. For that reason, assessors have to be cautious and rely more on techniques such as self-assessment and assessment based on progress, continuous and formative assessment, rather than on the use of summative assessment techniques such as objective and subjective tests.

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