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ABSTRACT

While most foreign language programs list communicative language use as a primary goal, classroom tests seldom reflect this objective but rather focus on discrete-point linguistic competence. The authors present a model of the communication process and point to the main task in constructing tests of communicative competence: devising simulated communicative situations in which the student can send or receive an extended message to fulfill a situational task requirement within his limited range of the target language vocabulary and structures. Examples of items for testing listening comprehension, reading, writing, speaking, as well as integrative skill use are given, and problems of administering and scoring tests of communicative competence are discussed. The paper concludes by summarizing student reactions to tests of communicative competence actually administered in a classroom situation. (Author)

Approaches to the Testing of Communicative Competence

by
Walter H. Bartz and Renate A. Schulz

(Paper delivered at the Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, April 18-20, 1974)

When talking about testing and evaluation in any subject matter the most important considerations are: 1. What are our goals and objectives? 2. What do we want our students to be able to do after instruction? It is useless to talk about evaluation and testing without a clear understanding of our goals. Most foreign language programs state communicative ability as a primary goal. However, in the bustle of everyday classroom instruction, we are too much concerned with those goals which reflect a means to an end and not the end itself. This relationship between goals and evaluation may be one of the underlying problems with which we as a profession are faced.

One of the purposes of this paper will be to show that the evaluation of communicative competence has been ignored and that the profession has preoccupied itself with the evaluation of what could be called, for the want of a better term, secondary goals. By secondary goals are meant those objectives which deal with the means to an end and not the end itself. Let us assume that one of the primary goals in foreign language education is the ability to communicate in that language, then secondary objectives would be the acquisition of those components which would aid

the student to achieve this goal. Such secondary goals would involve the acquisition of such skills as good pronunciation, sound discrimination, grammatical manipulation, etc. It becomes obvious then, that these secondary goals which are mainly linguistic abilities, or which one may call linguistic competence, are not an end in themselves but rather serve as a means to achieving an end. Our whole instructional and evaluation strategy has been built on the premise that control over linguistic elements of the language will automatically assure communicative competence in the language. If one takes a serious look at testing and evaluation procedures, teacher-made tests, and commercially available tests, one finds that the vast majority of the tests in foreign languages are concerned with the evaluation of secondary objectives only.

From the student's point of view we must remember that he perceives the tests as a reflection of our goals and will emphasize those skills which are required to successfully complete the tests. Thus language study is viewed by many of our students as a course in grammatical problem solving.

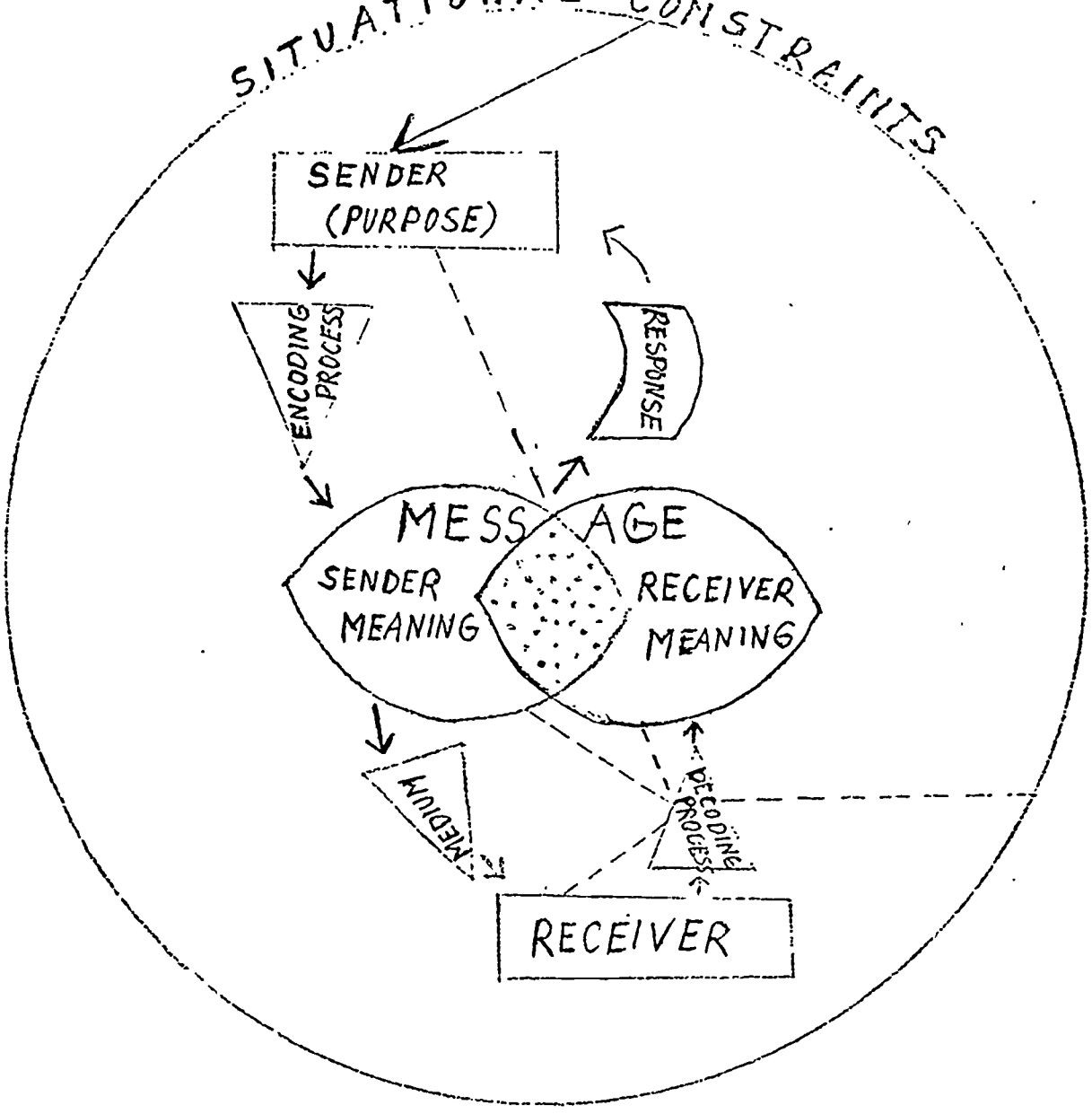
To return to the basic point, if communicative competence is one of our primary goals then it would seem most logical that evaluation of this skill should be included in our testing program. Evaluation of discrete point secondary goals alone will not give us a true picture of the progress our students are making toward communicative proficiency and will distort in the minds of the student what our primary goals are. The most obvious solution to this problem would seem to be to devise testing procedures which would measure proficiency in the ability to communicate.

The authors have attempted to devise proecdures for testing communicative proficiency and have administered such tests to high school and college foreign language students. In the remainder of this paper we would like to share with you some of the considerations and problems involved in the construction of such simulated communication tests, mention some considerations in administering such tests, discuss some problems of evaluation, and finally, summarize general student reaction to the testing procedures.

Constructing Tests of Communicative Ability

In approaching the task of constructing evaluation instruments which measure how well a student can use the target languages in a simulated communication situation, an adequate model of the communication process had to be devised. For any language activity to be communication, certain ingredients must be present. The following model is an attempt to define these ingredients:

SIMPLIFIED MODEL OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION PROCESS



--- EXTRA-LINGUISTIC INFLUENCE

::: COMMUNICATION

Model adapted from DAVID K. BERLO. THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION. AN INTRODUCTION TO THEO
1960 [illegible] NEW YORK: HOLT RINEHART AND Winsto

Essentially all human communication takes place in some physical setting and is bound and influenced by some situational constraints. Within this defined communicative setting and often motivated by it, we have a sender (or source of communication) with a specific purpose for wanting to communicate. This sender can be one of several individuals. The purpose can be to convey information, intentions, ideas, or a personal need to another individual or group of individuals. Next is the encoding process, the process used in transforming these non-material ideas and needs into some physically perceivable message. This message is relayed to the receiver or listener by some medium (or carrier) which can be either sound waves (oral speech), light waves (written language) or some visual representation such as pictures or gestures.

The receiver, in his attempt to decode the message, will interpret the message and allot meaning to it using an interplay of various senses, e.g. his ears to listen, his eyes to read or watch gestures as well as personal impressions gained from the sender, his previous experience (cultural and linguistic) and the situational constraints. The meaning he will give the message is not necessarily identical to the meaning intended by the sender, but to the extent that the sender and receiver meaning overlap and are shared, communication takes place.

As a last element in this continuous process the receiver responds to the message, and this response determines the fate of the process, either terminating the cycle or leading into another communication cycle.

Keeping the basic model of the communication process in mind, the main task in constructing tests of communicative competence is to devise simulated communication situations in which the student can send or receive an extended message to fulfill a situational task requirement within his limited range of the target language vocabulary and structures. The student should be able to fulfill a given communicative task by integrating and synthesizing structures and vocabulary actually learned and practiced during the course of instruction because obviously we cannot ask the level I student to give an oral report on a moonshot to a hypothetical audience of monolingual German speakers.

The following are some examples of test items administered to college and secondary students arranged by skill.

A. Listening Comprehension Tests

Example #1

(Instruction to the students): While you are listening to the following conversation, pretend you are at the customs office at Orly airport near Paris and you overhear a conversation between a customs official and a woman. You will hear the conversation twice. While listening, jot down in English the following information:
the woman's nationality_____
her place of residence_____
when she will go there (to her place of residence)_____
what she is carrying_____
her occupation_____

(Instruction for administration): Let student hear conversation twice.
Student hears:

Official:	Bonjour mademoiselle, vous êtes américaine?
Woman:	Non, monsieur, je suis espagnole.
Official:	Où habitez-vous en France?
Woman:	J'habite à Bordeaux.
Official:	Quand allez-vous à Bordeaux?
Woman:	Je vais à Bordeaux demain après midi.
Official:	Qu'est-ce vous apportez?
Woman:	J'apporte une serviette et des livres.
Official:	Ah, vous êtes professeur?

Woman: Non, monsieur, je suis étudiante.
Official: Bon, merci, mademoiselle. Au revoir.
Woman: Au revoir, monsieur.

Answers:

the woman's nationality	Spanish
her place of residence:	Bordeaux
when will she go there:	tomorrow afternoon
what is she carrying:	a briefcase and books
her occupation:	student

Suggested scoring: Give 3 points for each correct item of information regardless of length or form of answer. (Total: 15 points)

Example #2

(Instructions to the students): You and a group of students are visiting Genève. You are now waiting at the train station for Maurice, a Belgian student. You ask your Swiss guide, "Où est Maurice?" and he gives you directions in order to go and find him. On the attached map, follow the oral instructions with a line and mark an X at the building or store where you expect to find Maurice. The directions will be given twice. (Note: Student has copy of simplified map of Genève.)

(Instruction for administration): Read the directions once, making adequate pauses between sentences so that students can follow directions on their map. Then re-read directions without pauses for a double check.

1. Vous traversez la place.
2. Vous allez tout droit.
3. Traversez l'avenue de Genève et continuez tout droit.
4. Au café, vous tournez à gauche.
5. Vous continuez tout droit jusqu'au coin.
6. Tournez à droite et Maurice est à côté du café.

Suggested scoring: Give 3 points for each direction correctly followed (up to where students get lost). (Total points possible: 18)

Note: The more highly the item is structured the easier it is to evaluate. If directions ask for general summaries of information without asking for specific points, the amount of information given by the student will vary greatly.

Example #3

(Instruction to the students): You are living in Germany with a German family (the Schmidts) for the summer. The whole family has gone out of the house. The telephone rings. You answer the phone and after appropriate greetings, the party on the line wants to talk to Frau Schmidt. You try to tell her she is not there, but she insists on giving you a message. You hear her say the following. Listen carefully and take notes

in English. Then write up in English your message for Frau Schmidt.

(Instruction for administration) Read the following telephone message at a "normal" rate leaving small pauses between each sentence. Read the message the second time without pauses.

Ich bin die Nachbarin, Frau Müller. Ich wollte Frau Schmidt sprechen. Würden Sie ihr bitte sagen, dass ich morgen um 8 Uhr vorbeikomme und dann können wir zusammen einkaufen gehen. Sie hat mir gestern gesagt, dass ich mit meinem Auto fahren soll, aber das kann ich jetzt nicht. Mein Mann muss das Auto haben. Er muss morgen früh nach Hamburg fahren. Ich möchte gern beim Supermarkt in Bremen einkaufen. Nach Bremen müssen wir aber fahren. Ich möchte wissen, ob wir mit Frau Schmidt's Auto fahren können. Sagen Sie ihr, dass sie mich heute abend um 10 Uhr anrufen soll.

Scoring procedure: One point per item of information comprehended by the student as reflected in his English message for Frau Schmidt.

B. Reading Tests

Similar procedures as in listening comprehension can be used for testing reading. The student was given a reading passage and had to either summarize the information in English, or answer specific questions about the content of the passage.

C. Writing Tests

Example #1

(Instructions to the student): In this part of the test you will be asked to write a short note to a German friend on the topic below. If you can't think of a German word don't hesitate to use an English one so that you can continue to write. Write as much as you can in the 5 minutes allotted.

Write a short note informing your friend that you will visit him next weekend. (Include such information as, when you will arrive, how long you plan to stay, when you will leave, how you will travel, etc.)

Scoring procedure: One point per item of information conveyed. (More information on how this was done will come later in this paper.)

Example #2

French 101A
Final Examination page 5

Name: _____

IX. Writing (25 points)
After travelling in Europe for the summer, you end up in Genève, Switzerland, totally broke and forced to look for a job. You come across the following ad in the newspaper La Tribune de Genève:

Mesdemoiselles, Messieurs

désirez-vous une profession avec avancement rapide ?
Une Compagnie internationale américaine cherche des

Nous offrons :
— une formation complète
— une situation intéressante
— un portefeuille important

et messieurs
dames

Nous demandons :
— le sens des responsabilités et des contacts humains
— nationalité suisse ou permis C
— âge idéal : 25-35 ans.

Arthur MURRAY Studio
2, cours de Rive (4e étage) De 10 à 12 h. et de 14 h. à 18 h.
2197 Tc

Note: permis C refers to a Swiss working permit for foreign nationals.

You decide to apply for the advertised position.
In order to be considered for the job, you have to submit a short résumé in French about your background.
Write as many sentences as you can, including any information which might be helpful in getting you the job. Be sure to include the following information:

who you are
when and where you were born
where you live at present (use your imagination)
profession
what university you attended
how long you have studied French
how long you have been in Switzerland
how well you speak French
what other languages you speak

continue on back, if necessary

Another means of testing communicative writing is the question-answer technique, the student answering in writing written questions. The technique involves reading as well as writing skills.

D. Speaking Tests

For testing communicative competence in speaking we utilized two basic procedures, dialogue and monologue. A monologue has the advantage of being a pure speaking test and can be administered to a large group in a language laboratory. Some examples of a monologue technique are: description of a picture, description of a sequence of pictures depicting on-going activities, a student giving a discourse on a particular topic or relating some information he has read. One such monologue procedure is described below:

(Instructions to the student): In this part of the test you will be asked to tell in German something you have read in English. Pretend you are talking to a German in Germany. If you can't think of how to say a word in German, say it in English or ask me how to say it in German. Read the paragraph over twice and then I will give you a list of the important facts in the paragraph. With the help of the list tell all you can in German about the paragraph. Try to give the information in the most natural way you can.
(Paragraph student reads): Karl and Jane are friends. Karl lives in Germany and studies English. Jane lives in America and studies German. Last summer Jane went to Germany and lived with Karl's family. She stayed there for six weeks. Next summer Karl is coming to America to visit Jane. Karl will travel with Jane's family in their new car. They will go from New York to California.
(List of important facts student sees as he relates the information of the paragraph in German): Karl and Jane - friends
Karl - Germany - studies English
Jane - America - studies German
Last summer - Jane to Germany - Karl's family - 6 weeks
Next summer - Karl to America - travel - Jane's family - new car - New York - California
Scoring procedure: Evaluators using a rating scale, described later in this paper.

Monologue procedures do have some advantages as mentioned above, however, there are disadvantages too, in that extended monologues are somewhat artificial, thus for more realistic speaking procedures we used a dialogue, basically the interview. Of course, the interview involves more than one skill. In addition to the speaking skill the student has to demonstrate listening comprehension.

In an interview setting the student can be assigned one of two roles. He can either be in a situation where he must obtain information or where he must give information. The following are two examples, one of each type, with the "giving information" type first.

Interview (Giving Information)

(Instruction to the s. .nt): In this part of the test you will play the role of someone being interviewed by a German. I will play the role of the interviewer. I will pretend that I cannot speak or understand any English so you will have to try very hard to make yourself understood. I will ask you questions about yourself; try to answer in the most natural way you can by making as many sentences as you can and by giving me as much information as you can, the more the better.
(Questions asked by the interviewer): Wie heissen Sie? Wo wohnen Sie? Wie lange haben Sie schon deutsch studiert? Warum studieren Sie deutsch? Wenn Sie mit der "high school" fertig sind, was wollen Sie dann machen? (studieren: Wo? Was?) (arbeiten: Wo? Was?) Was haben Sie im letzten Sommer gemacht? Was machen Sie im nächsten Sommer? Waren Sie schon (je) in Deutschland? (Ja, wo? wie lange? was haben Sie dort gemacht?) (Nein, Wollen Sie nach Deutschland, Warum? Warum nicht? Wann?) Wenn Sie sehr viel Geld hätten, was würden Sie damit tun?
Scoring procedure: Evaluators using a rating scale, described later in this paper.

Interview (Getting information):
(Instruction to the students): In this part of the test you will play the role of the interviewer interviewing me. Try to conduct the

interview in as natural manner as you can, remembering to introduce yourself and to close the interview in some appropriate manner. Remember we will pretend I cannot speak any English so you will have to try very hard to make yourself understood. Take notes in English as you ask me questions and at the end of the interview write up in English all you have found out about me. Try to find out the following information, and more if at all possible.
Name of person interviewed
Where he comes from
How long he will stay in U.S.
What he is doing here
What he has seen of U.S.
Which part of the country he likes best
If he would like to live here
Why? (Why not?)
What he will do when he gets back home
Scoring procedure: Evaluators using a rating scale, described later in this paper plus counting information student wrote up in his summary of the interview (in English).

The above are examples of communicative competence tests administered to college (French) and high school (German) students. Other procedures and tests were used, but these should be sufficient to illustrate techniques employed.

Administering Tests of Communicative Ability

Administering tests of communicative competence does not pose any unexpected or unusual problems in the receptive skills and in writing. These tests can be given individually as well as to conventionally sized classes during conventionally scheduled periods. Speaking presents a somewhat different case, in that communicative speaking tests often need to be administered individually or in small groups. Any realistic dialogue situation involving the speaking and listening skill simultaneously necessitates, of course, a one to one interaction. However, the monologue procedures de-

scribed previously can easily be given to a group of students in the language laboratory. But, as will be mentioned later, the great majority of students seems to intensely dislike the language lab for oral testing purposes.

Evaluation

The crux of communicative competence testing, or for that matter of any testing, is in the evaluation procedure. The basic question, how will one evaluate and score students' proficiency in communicative competence must be based upon the concept of what communication is, thus one must return to the model of communication to establish criteria for evaluation. Looking again at the model presented earlier, one finds that in order for the communicative act to be successful, the interaction of the "sender" and the "receiver" depends largely on the "message" component and to what degree there is an overlap in the sender's meaning and the receiver's meaning. This overlap is the primary component which can be measured, for it may vary in its magnitude. Student responses on tests of communicative competence, at least in the productive skills, are to a great extent unpredictable. The simple question: "How are you?" could conceivably be answered by such retorts as: "Fine, thank you," "None of your business," "Miserable," or "I have just returned from four weeks vacation in Honolulu and feel absolutely marvelous," etc. It is obvious that in evaluating these responses something other than (or in addition to) linguistic correctness must be scored, because the student with a linguistically correct one-word response would receive a 100%, while the student who attempts longer responses but makes some errors would get unduly penalized.

German students using two native German speakers as judges, it was found that the correlational computations using the Pearson product-moment resulted in an "r" of .78. This was felt to be a substantial correlation for inter-judge reliability considering the practice the evaluators needed, especially at the beginning of the testing program. Higher correlations are expected in the final testing.

It should be pointed out here that training of the evaluators is essential for reliability and consistency in scoring. In a practical instructional setting where the teacher would be the only evaluator, consistency in scoring would be the vital factor in achieving scorer reliability. Other scales to measure quantity of communication were used for purposes of determining which would demonstrate the highest reliability and usability. Data on these have not been analyzed and it is hoped this will aid in the construction and use of such scales.

Turning now from the quantity dimension in evaluation to the quality dimension, here again several scales were devised. One of these scales called "Fluency" based upon the Peace Corps Language Proficiency Interview[1] was defined as follows:

> General definition: Fluency does not refer here to absolute speed of delivery, since native speakers of any language often show wide variation in this area. Fluency refers to overall smoothness, continuity, and naturalness of the student's speech, as opposed to pauses for rephrasing sentences, groping for words and so forth. Ask yourself the question: to what degree does this student's delivery approach a native's in terms of <u>smoothness</u> and <u>continuity</u>?

[1] Educational Testing Service 6/70 (xeroxed handout)
Protase E. Woodford, ETS, Princeton, N.J., "Foreign Language Testing: Where do we go from here?" Paper delivered at the 7th Annual Meeting of ACTFL, Boston, Mass. November 22-25, 1973.

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Definition of each level on the scale:

1. Very many unnatural pauses, very halting and fragmentary delivery
2. Quite a few unnatural pauses, frequentiy halting and fragmentary
3. Some unnatural pauses, occasionally halting and fragmentary delivery
4. Hardly any unnatural pauses, fairly smooth and effortless delivery
5. No unnatural, almost effortless and smooth but perceptibly still non-native.
6. Speech is as effortless and smooth as a native speaker's.

This scale showed a fairly high correlation of .81 between the two evaluators.

In terms of the quality of communication, other aspects in addition to fluency should perhaps be evaluated and this was done with a scale titled just that, "Quality of Communication." In this scale the emphasis was shifted from "smoothness" of delivery to the ability of the student to produce native-like utterances appropriate to the communication task.

General definition:
Quality of communication refers to the ability of the student to use the language in a manner which would be considered "natural" or "normal" in a given communicative situation. Ask yourself the question: To what degree does the student produce native-like responses or utterances as the situation demands?
Definition of each level on the scale:

1. Speech consists mostly of inappropriate isolated words and/or incomplete sentences with just a few very short complete sentences.
2. Speech consists of many inappropriate isolated words and/or incomplete sentences with some very short complete sentences.
3. Speech consists of some inappropriate isolated words and/or incomplete sentences with many very short complete sentences.
4. Speech consists of hardly any inappropriate isolated words/and/or incomplete sentences with mostly complete sentences.
5. Speech consists of isolated words only if appropriate and almost always of complete sentences.
6. Speech consists of isolated words only if appropriate, otherwise always "native-like" appropriate complete sentences.

This scale correlated very highly (r .92) with the "Fluency" scale; thus it may be advisable to collapse or combine the two scales into one for the sake of efficiency. Quality of communication could also be defined as linguistic correctness. The basic decision to be made by the evaluator would be whether the utterance is linguistically correct or not. We have used this type of scale, but as of yet have no statistical data concerning it.

Thus far, the evaluation procedures described have dealt mainly with the speaking skill because of the difficulty of evaluating this mode of communication. In testing listening comprehension or reading, the evaluation of communicative competence was done mainly in terms of the quantity dimension. That is, the information that the student heard or read was quantified and the student's response which was usually in English, was in turn quantified and scored. Quantifying information usually poses no great problem, as long as one is consistent from student to student. In the case of the listening comprehension test in which the student was to take a telephone message and then write it up in English, the evaluation was simply carried out by counting the points of information that the student had in his message that were consistent with what he had heard. Any misinformation could simply not be counted or could count against him by assigning negative points. The same procedure was used in the reading comprehension tests. Points of information in the student's English summary were counted and totalled to arrive at a score.

The other productive skill, writing, could be evaluated in a similar manner as the speaking tests using scales which measure quantity and quality.

However, it was found that the quality dimension cannot be handled in the same way as in the speaking test. Here, linguistic aspects such as morphology, syntax, and spelling, etc. seem to have a greater influence on the comprehensibility of a written utterance than of a spoken one. This is perhaps due to the lower level of tolerance for error which we have when dealing with the written language as opposed to the spoken language. Thus for the purposes of the study only quantity was scored. This was done using a binary criterion, i.e. the evaluator had to judge whether or not an utterance (sentence) was comprehensible or not and simply count the comprehensible sentences to arrive at a score. The only restriction, of course, was that the sentence had to be relevant to the particular communicative situation in order to be counted. Thus far, this evaluation has been carried out by two evaluators with what seems to be a rather high percentage of agreement. Final data on inter-judge reliability has not been computed. The authors have tried to approach some of these problems by devising some tests as have been described but much more needs to be done.

Student Reaction to Simulated Communication Testing Procedures

The students involved in our respective studies were to various degrees exposed to both discrete point and communicative testing procedures. On a questionnaire administered to 79 beginning college French students the reaction was overwhelmingly in favor of communicative tests. Only 21% of the 79 respondents preferred discrete-point procedures on an oral exam, and of these 21% the majority came from a group who had solely taken discrete point tests during the academic quarter and gave as reasons for their preference that they had

previous practice with such tests.

Let us quote some other reasons for preferring structural pattern drills to communicative use of the language:

> "I am lousy on vocabulary and I could do this part (oral grammatical transformations) without knowing it."
>
> "I didn't have to make up an entire sentence by myself."
>
> "I did not need to recall a lot of words as most of them were given."
>
> "I can answer this part (oral grammatical transformations) without knowing what it means."
>
> "I wasn't used to having to ask and answer questions and had a hard time trying to put disconnected pieces I have learned ail together."

The above are valid personal reasons for preferring discrete point items to communicative use of the language, but are they also valid pedagogical reasons to justify our use of these items for testing purposes?

The 50 high school students involved in one of the studies responded somewhat differently to the questionnaire. On the oral test they had no decided preference for either the discrete point or the communicative procedures. On the written test, however, there was what appears a significant preference for the communicative tests. Eighty-six percent of the reactions were positive toward the written communicative test while only 60% were positive toward the written linguistic part.

Other comments made by the college group indicated a consensus that discrete point listening comprehension tests (multiple-choice, question - answer, rejoinder or completion items) were considered very difficult and

seemed rather artificial to students. Many students pleaded for more time on these items which puts into question the audio-lingual edict of using "native language speed" in foreign language instruction.

While several students commented on the value of the language laboratory for practice purposes, only 16% of the responding college French students liked to be tested in the language laboratory regardless of whether the procedure was discrete point or communicative. Student agreement was very clear on the reasons for disliking lab tests. The general consensus was that oral tests in the lab are too artificial, too impersonal, and too inflexible as far as the time needs of individual students are concerned. They were further criticized for making students nervous, for permitting no reinforcement or feedback on whether student response was correct, and for being too distracting because of the noise made by other students.

Both the college and high school groups expressed the need for more communication tests and especially for the opportunity of more communicative use of the target language in the classroom. Quoting two representative student comments, one stated: Pattern drills "are plastic exercises and I find it hard to relate this back into conversational French." Another student wrote: "I think they (discrete point tests) limit the material too much and make it easy to concentrate on isolated points and forget the material in earlier lessons."

Conclusion:

In conclusion, let us emphasize that we are not advocating the elimination of all discrete point testing procedures. Such tests can and should be used

for diagnostic purposes to see whether a student recognizes or recalls a specific structure or sound. Furthermore, discrete point tests are undeniably easier to grade, often easier to construct and more reliable in their evaluation. However, efficiency alone does not justify the sole use of discrete point items as evaluation measures. We need to devise and include valid and reliable measures of communicative competence to:

1. adequately reflect our professed objective of communication;
2. help student and teacher keep in mind that language is primarily a creative tool of communication rather than a grammatical obstacle course;
3. help emphasize that language learning is cumulative and provide testing situations where the student can re-enter, integrate and synthesize into communicative language the discrete linguistic elements learned.
4. give the student a realistic insight of what he is capable of doing with the target language.