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Teaching for Communication or Teaching to Tests? — the Voices of the European Language Teachers

Abstract: The paper drawing on the information from an online survey for European language teachers attempts to answer the question whether foreign language teaching still serves communication or rather it aims at preparing students for passing final multiple language tests. In view of the fact that the value of language communication has been stressed in the language curricula and at the same time the value of final language exams is emphasised, the question posed in the paper seems to be valid.

The first part of the article sheds some light on the problem in question and discusses the place of communication in foreign language teaching and learning. Next, language teachers' reflections on teaching for communication and teaching to test are discussed. From the survey data emerges a general trend in language teaching, namely teaching to language test prevails over teaching to communicate. From the qualitative data several issues appear to give cause for concern such as insufficient amount of in-class communication, attaching too much importance to the results of final language tests, testing students' language competence primarily by focus-on-forms tests, and students' poor communicative skills.

Keywords: foreign language teaching, communicative approach, language testing, teacher reflection

1. Problem identification

The Communicative Approach, which rose to prominence in the 1970s and early 1980s, recognized the importance of the learner's communicative competence. Consequently, communicative syllabi were developed and teaching communicative skills to L2 learners started to be stressed (Richards and Rodgers 2001). This is reflected in language curricula which are built upon developing communicative skills. For this reason language teachers should implement communication activities in L2 classrooms such as role-play, information gap, interviews or communicative games. Yet, it seems that there is a yawning gap between rhetoric and reality.

In many language classes exam-based language learning tends to be emphasized at the expense of communicative skills. As a language teacher I was often constrained by curricula which attached too much importance to the specific grammar or lexical structures tested at final language examinations. Many times I needed to reduce communicative activities to spend more time on teaching students to use specific grammar or lexical structures. I did it even though some of the structures are not used in real life communication with native speakers. Exam-based language learning is encouraged not only by curricula but also the heads of schools and departments. Secondary schools and universities participate in a competition in which final exam results published on a website are far more important than the real language communicative abilities of students.

Should we then abandon teaching to tests and focus just on teaching for communication? This is a thorny question for students, their parents, and language teachers. The validity of discussion on priorities in language class has been assumed by linguists and specialists in language education. Cummins (2000), for example, asserts that learning to test and learning for communication represent two separate types of learning which involve different skills. The former is related to academic language skills also called by Cummins *cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP). The skills are needed to succeed in a class test or on a final language exam. Standardised language proficiency or achievement tests applied with secondary or high school students do not measure communicative skills but rather cognitive skills such as the ability of comparing, inferring, synthesizing, or evaluating. These abilities may be tested either in a verbal or written form. Furthermore, standardised language proficiency tests put an emphasis on language grammar correctness and sophisticated vocabulary use, which are difficult to be achieved if a language teacher gives priority in his/her class to communication skills.

Learning for communication, in turn, includes *social skills* necessary to function in a target language society. The skills are not tested at standardised language proficiency or achievement tests. Teaching communication in a foreign language is focused on conveying a message successfully and not on language correctness such as e.g. a selection of exact grammar form. It should be also noticed that communication-based classes do not require any specialized vocabulary. As Cummins notices, comprehension is aided by the context of the social situation. As a learner of multiple foreign languages I can say that my communication with interlocutors was always more successful if I used effectively some social clues e.g. non-verbal clues than when I used only correct grammar but neglected these clues.

For the majority of language learners the two types of learning mentioned by Cummins are important. University students who learn a foreign language for specific purposes would definitely benefit from CALP skills which are necessary for passing various language exams such as Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) or Business English Certificate. These tests are required by

foreign universities if a student applies for admission to overseas study programs or by companies which sometimes set pass rates of language tests as incentives for bonuses. Social skills are also valued by university students. Such skills can be used during immersion period at overseas study or in professional life for the purpose of business or legal communication. However, certain aspects of communication e.g. slang or dialects are not practised with university students. With regard to secondary school students both CALP and social skills are necessary, though the former is not enhanced so much as in formal academic setting. The CALP skills need to be mastered to pass various language tests whereas social skills to pass language oral exams in which there is a focus on language functions (requests, asking for directions etc.).

The discussion on teaching to test or teaching for communication does not concern excluding any of the two teaching types but rather finding an appropriate balance between the two elements. The current situation seems to indicate that language teachers are not able to comply with the Council of Europe and Language Policy Unit's guidelines on teaching modern languages in line with the principles of communicative approach. There is a need to teach to test but in a communicative fashion and adjust tests to a communicative context.

2. The value of language communication in Europe

In the last two or three decades the objectives of teaching foreign languages have changed. In the times of popular grammar translation method known as classic method students were supposed to master the ability of translating literary texts from their native language to a target language and vice versa. In the 1960s with the emergence of behaviourism the audio lingual method was introduced to foreign language classrooms. Though communication with native speakers was stressed in the method, it was artificial communication based on fixed language patterns memorisation. Moreover, the method prepared students to communicate with native speakers who served as a model of pronunciation (Larsen and Freeman 2011). Up to the end of 1970s, and in East and Central Europe even to the end of the 1980s, the two language teaching methods were mainly used at secondary and higher education levels. With the appearance of the communicative language teaching approach changes in curricula were introduced. Language teachers had to teach communication, not the artificial one promoted in the audio lingual method but real life communication embedded in the context of multilingual speakers. Nowadays the communicative language teaching recommended by the Council of Europe is used across the European countries (European Commission 2012a).

The unified Europe needs the citizens who are able to communicate in multiple languages. What is more, Europe based on democratic processes requires competence in the languages of *all* member states. Language skills are important

not only for access to information but also improved employment opportunities. It should be noticed that the necessity of communication in a foreign language has been repeatedly stressed by the Council of Europe. In the document published by Language Policy Unit edited by Beacco et al. (2012: 3) one may read that "classical and modern foreign languages have educational goals which are both humanistic and utilitarian." One of the utilitarian goals is communication with other interlocutors. Head of the Modern Languages Division — Joseph Sheils — also stresses the importance of communication. In his report he draws attention to the fact that

> *communication skills* in other languages and cultures can reduce the risk of prejudice and intolerance by developing deeper understanding and acceptance of the different ways of life and forms of thought of other peoples … (Sheils 2001: 1)

From the above quotation emerges the main objective of modern language learning, namely developing individual plurilingualism and pluriculturalism. This goal is reflected in a Recommendation to member states in 1998 issued by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. In the Recommendation one may find out that promotion of widespread pluringualism is possible by "encouraging all Europeans to achieve a degree of *communicative ability* in a number of languages." This means that the European citizens do not have to master perfectly several languages but to possess *communicative ability* in at least two foreign languages. In line with the 1+2 principle a European citizen should communicate in his mother tongue and two other languages, one of which is a language of a neighbouring state. Furthermore, communicative competence which in the past relied on a native speaker model has been recently replaced with an intercultural speaker who is able to mediate between different cultures and social groups.

The most important Council of Europe instrument enabling the improvement of communicative language teaching, learning and assessment is the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR). The document refers directly to learners' communicative competence describing in a comprehensive way what they need to learn in order to be able to use a language for communication. Furthermore, it discusses what language skills and knowledge learners have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. It is worth noticing that the Framework provides all the descriptions in the cultural context in which language is set. Finally, the CEFR defines levels of proficiency which allow to measure progress language learners made at each stage of learning and on a lifelong basis.

The Council of Europe has also developed a complementary document to the CEFR, namely *Level descriptions for specific languages* providing explicit learning objectives for communication in a foreign language. Here a learner may find out

> what users of a specific language are most likely to wish or need to be able to do in the *communicative situations* in which they take part, and consequently what they have to know and the skills they have to develop in order to be able to communicate effectively in those situations. (Van Ek and Trim 2001: X)

In Van Ek and Trim's book *Vantage* the authors refer to upper-intermediate proficiency level specifying how students should be able to use the English language in everyday communication.[1] They present the lexical and grammatical exponents of the most fundamental situations, topics, functions and notions. Furthermore, Van Ek and Trim also describe necessary components of the highest proficiency level such as sociocultural competence, learning strategies, pronunciation and intonation.

Communicative competence has been fostered in Europe from the very early years of learners. In line with the *early start language education policy* children are taught communication in a foreign language starting from the age of 6 (European Commission 2012b). In Spain language education is compulsory at kindergarten level. In Poland it will be mandatory in all kindergartens starting from September 1st 2015.

Communicative language learning is encouraged across all European states, particularly in English which is nowadays Lingua Franca. According to the Key Data for 2012 English is the most taught foreign language in nearly all of the 32 countries covered in the survey (27 Member States, Croatia before accession, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey) — a trend that has significantly increased since 2004/05. English is also by far the most taught foreign language in the European schools at all educational levels. At higher education level students opt for English as they are aware that communication in this language is most desired in their future professional life. Only a very small percentage of them choose French, Spanish, German and Russian.

3. What does the communicative approach involve?

As I have already mentioned the communicative approach was a response to the grammar translation and audio lingual methods. Since the communicative approach is recommended by the Council of Europe, the European Ministries of Education, schools and universities emphasise in their documents the value of communication. Language curricula, study plans, or programmes in various countries refer either implicitly or explicitly to acquisition of communication skills being one of the most important language teaching objectives. Detailed information may be accessed in the *Country/Region/City Reports* and *Language Education Policy Profiles* prepared for the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe.

There is some misunderstanding of the communicative approach in a sense that communication is only linked to the development of students' speaking skill and extension of foreign language vocabulary. However, the approach does not neglect other language skills and language aspects. On the contrary, it emphasises

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[1] Vantage is one of the three stages of language learning. The lowest stage is called Waystage, the medium Threshold whereas the highest one is Vantage.

teaching all these elements but from the perspective of communication. Larsen-Freeman (2011: 120) summarises the communicative approach using a catchy phrase: [the approach is about] "knowing when and how to say what to whom." To be able to do it a learner needs adequate grammar, vocabulary, and phonology/phonetics. With regard to grammar, it should be taught implicitly rather than explicitly, and inductively rather than deductively. The communicative language approach also stresses the importance of acquiring vocabulary which can be used in real-life situations and is relevant to students' interests (family, leisure, food, home, etc.). Only when students become more proficient in a target language they are acquainted with the richer vocabulary including synonyms, antonyms, homonyms and special terms. As to pronunciation, it is a native-like pronunciation which is promoted in the communicative approach, however in the recent years there is no so much stress on native-likeness. The three language aspects mentioned above should not be treated as discrete linguistic elements within sentence-level but in global communicative context. Unfortunately, language tests are frequently based on sentence-level context, focus on elicitation of one correct form required by the authors of the key.

The communicative approach promotes *the extensive exposure to the target language*, which is achieved by intensive use of a foreign language in a language class and avoidance of students' mother tongue. Yet, students' native language may be used for example for explaining complex grammar, checking students' understanding or making best of the time available for teaching. The communicative approach also imposes on foreign language teachers *the use of authentic materials*. Among the recommended materials there are films, songs, poems, advertisements and recipes.

Nowadays one cannot imagine communicative language teaching without *information and communication technologies* (ICT). More and more teachers follow the contemporary trend and introduce computer-based materials into language classrooms. *E-learning*, *blended learning* or *podcasting* may be used for communicating and language learning between learners from various countries. It is worth noticing that ICT constitute an important tool developing not only students' communicative skills but also their autonomy at all levels of learning.

In line with the communicative approach principles language learners at secondary and higher education levels need to engage in spontaneous communication without any prior planning to talk about topics taken from everyday life. In an oral test situation students usually are encouraged to engage in a conversation with an examiner or a peer. Prior communication students are presented with various stimuli such as a poster or a picture, a thought-provoking headline, a piece of listening etc. Listening is particularly important in developing learners' communicative skills. Students should understand a variety of messages in various communication situations by using different strategies. With regard to reading students are encouraged to read in a global and detailed manner, read

aloud, pinpoint specific information in the text and identify its aesthetic aspects. Additionally, they should be able to read between the lines, tell a difference between a fact and an opinion, pick up the logical structures of the language, anticipate the content of the text, identify the meaning of unfamiliar words by the context or by deducing how the word was formed. As to writing certain actions related to the acquisition of skills in written expression are expected from students such as copying a text, taking notes, filling in various forms, planning a text and writing it either freely or to a certain model. It should be also stressed that in the communicative approach language teachers do not treat four language skills as separate entities. Language teachers are encouraged to use *an integrated approach* that assimilates these skills. The integrated approach should also be applied for testing language.

4. Study preparation

During the spring 2014 I prepared a short online survey with the intention that I will find out the answer to the question whether modern language teaching serves communication or it aims at preparing students for passing final language exams.

From the very beginning I conceived the survey to be qualitative rather than quantitative since I intended to show individual viewpoints represented by respondents from various European countries. An incentive for starting the study was my personal experience as a language teacher, academic, and a parent. In the recent years I noticed a revival of traditional techniques of language teaching with an emphasis on rote memorisation of vocabulary families and explicit grammar rules learning. Though communicative skills are stressed in language curricula, they are hardly practised in a classroom. My colleagues and fellow parents shared my anxiety about the observable trend, namely teaching languages to students to make them excellent test-takers and not language speakers able to function in multiple contexts. Initially I had an impression that only in my native country Poland language teaching is so test-oriented. My EU study-visit in Bath and encounter with language teachers and academics from other European countries made me realised that what I observe in Poland may be also a European trend.

In the case of the East and Central Europe countries such as Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, or Hungary, the tradition of multiple choice testing is not long. After the collapse of communism in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the education systems of these countries became fascinated with multiple choice testing which replaced traditional open-ended forms of testing. A new form of testing became a kind of a trap since educators started to believe that all competence and skills may be tested by multiple choice questions. In fact, language is a specific entity which cannot be treated either as science or humanities and effectiveness of its learning should be measured by the effects of communication.

I have constructed the survey in such a way that the respondents could freely express their points of view related to the three open-ended questions:

Do you think there is enough communication in your language class? If not why is it so?

Do your supervisors, students and students' parents attach the importance to the results of final tests? Do language tests reflect communicative contexts or they rather focus on forms?

What is the proportion of time spent on practicing communication in L2 and teaching to test? What are the consequences of it?

24 language teachers participated in the survey. In the group there were 5 secondary school teachers and 19 university teachers who taught practical language classes in various university and college departments. The respondents represented 14 countries: 3 non-EU (Russia, Turkey, Ukraine), and 11 EU (Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, the UK). Most language teachers I encountered either via my contacts as an Erasmus lecturer visiting the respondents' countries or at my EU study-visit in Bath. Some language teachers being my colleagues in Poland volunteered to participate in the survey.

5. Teaching to test or to communicate — teachers' voices

In the recent years a range of education issues have started to be considered from multiple perspectives, including that of teachers. The role of teacher voices has been discussed extensively by Bransford et al. (2005) and Yost (2006). As Fullan (2001:12) notices, teachers' perceptions of their experiences are as important as these of students' as they can lead to improved practices and policies with regard to the teaching process. In the present study the opinions and experiences expressed in the survey by the European language teachers serve as a basis for language teaching improvements offered in the *Recommendations* section.

As has been mentioned, the survey consisted of three open-ended questions. The first question was related to the time spent on developing communicative skills in a classroom. From the feedback provided by the language teachers I understood that they had two problems with the first survey question. Firstly, the problem was with interpretation of a phrase "enough communication." I explained to all participants that the question refers to their subjective feelings. Secondly, the subjects seemed to confuse "communication" with "speaking" or "conversation." At some stage of the survey when their doubts appeared I needed to explain to them that communication is an umbrella term for all the forms of communicative practice which involves all language skills and language aspects.

The respondents gave interesting feedback on both quantity and quality of communication they experience in their language classes. Only 3 subjects (from Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK) were of the opinion that they are able to spend sufficient time on language communication. Other 21 respondents asserted there was not enough communication in class specifying a number of factors responsible for this situation. Some language teachers claimed insufficient communication was due to a combination of a few factors. The factors were following:

— pressure from administration (heads, supervisors) to cover more tests;
— pressure from parents to focus more on preparing students for tests;
— competition between schools, universities, departments, and individual language teachers — to achieve the best language test results;
— lack of time for communication and too much content to be covered.

Below I present some of the voices of the language teachers.

> Definitely I have not enough time on communication. I do information gap activities etc. to make them communicate more. But it's not enough. It happens that in a language class some students do not even say one word in a foreign language. Who is to be blame? Maybe our education system? I need to cover all the units from the book before the final written exams so only 10–15 minutes are left for practising communication. The department head asks me all the time about the results of students' final tests and whether I managed to cover all the material from the course book. (Andrea, a university teacher, Germany)

> It depends how you interpret *enough communication*. I wish I could practise more L2 communication with my students. I was thinking about allocating special classes just to conversation but it's impossible because I have only 3 classes a week. The course book I use is based on communication but when you have twenty four students in a language class you are not able to organise good communicative activities. Besides, my students' parents are so anxious about the final language exam results that I even need to give up communication to spend more time on preparing my pupils to pass exams successfully. Usually the parents pay for private language classes to make up for conversation in a foreign language. (Anna, a secondary school teacher, Poland)

As one can see, a class size may be also an obstacle to communicative language classes. In large groups of students there is not so much teacher–student interaction in a target language. Language teachers frequently organize their work in this way that they introduce pair-work to allow all students to engage in communication.

With regard to the second question, all language teachers working at universities and colleges responded that their supervisors and students attach a great importance to the results of the final language tests. They were not able to say whether the results were also important for students' parents.

> What we experience is a constant race. Tests and tests almost every day. Not only students compete with each other but also schools. We have some benchmarks we need to achieve. If teachers don't do it, they are not well evaluated. (Margot, a secondary school and university teacher, France)

Interestingly, there were some striking differences in the voices of the teachers from West and East and Central Europe working in secondary schools. The respondents from Belgium and France admitted that test results are not important for students' parents but rather what their children learn in a class. The participants from Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland stressed the fact that these are primarily students' parents who attach so much importance to the test results.

The discrepancy between the teachers' voices may account for different approaches to testing held by students' parents in the two parts of Europe. In East and Central Europe with relatively short language test tradition, the test results may be treated as an equivalent of a student's ultimate competence in a given field and therefore there is a pressure from parents to succeed on tests. In West Europe, which has a long test tradition, language test results may be treated as an informative instrument which allows a student to increase his competence.

In the same question I also attempted to elicit the information on a type of language tests the students are administered. I put in the question explicitly a difference between tests that mirror communicative contexts and those that focus on forms (e.g. declensions, conjugations, tenses, passive versus active voice, etc.). The overwhelming majority of the respondents (18 subjects) stated that focus-on-form tests prevail in their classes and final language exams. The language teachers in the study gave a range of motivations for using traditional focus-on-form tests. Most of them apply such tests because they want to practice what is expected from students at final language exams, namely elicitation of exact grammar or lexical forms. The respondents also mentioned the fact that focus-on-forms test were less demanding for them in comparison to other types of tests. Quoting Judit, a secondary school and university teacher from Hungary:

> Unfortunately, most tests reflect focus-on-form approach. Of course, there are some tests attached to a teacher's book which concentrate on language functions but to be honest I only occasionally do them in a class. I think it's easier for me to cover multiple choice questions. All I have to do is only to glance at the key and check whether it's a, b, c, or d. Language functions tests are time-consuming and more demanding for teachers. You know what I mean, don't you? I need to read some passage or listen to an extract before I give them a test. Besides, at final language tests there are only multiple choice questions so I prefer to cover the boring focus-on-forms tests.

The similar observations were made by Emre, a secondary school and private language teacher from Turkey:

> … and focus-on-forms tests are easier for me. In Turkey we have a strong tradition to focus on grammar teaching. Tests based on communicative context are *rere* [the author meant rare]. But it's getting better. We in Turkey are more and more aware of the importance of communication. And also the English pronunciation with which we have so many problems.

The third question on the proportion of time spent on practicing communication in L2 and teaching to tests yielded inconsistent results. Discrepancy between time spent on real communication and teaching for a test was between 20% and

80%. All language teachers admitted that they spent more time on preparing to test than to communicate. 3 subjects from Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK who said in Question 1 that they spent enough time on communication, declared to spend 70%–80% on practising communication. The least time spent on communication was in Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

> I know it does not make sense but I spend much more time on preparing them to a test. It takes 80% of my time. Mostly multiple choice tests. These tests are provided in the teacher's book. I have to cover them because at the final exams you may expect questions similar to these from the tests. (Svietlana, a secondary school teacher from Russia)

> 85% is for teaching for tests, which basically means teaching them grammar forms. It's crazy but in my university we come back to the despised grammar translation method and forget about communication! (Sabine, a university teacher from Germany)

> 70–80% teaching to test, the rest teaching to communicate. My students are excellent test-takers and have satisfactory results on final exams. My department even organizes extra classes before the final language exam to cover more tests. Despite good test results every year our students are worse and worse in L2 communication. Even five years ago secondary school graduates who take up studies at our university were at B2 level in English communication; nowadays they hardly attain B1 level. (Joanna, a secondary school teacher from Poland)

Though there are differences in the proportion of time spent on communicative activities across the European countries, a general trend observable in secondary and higher education is that teaching to test prevails over teaching to communicate. The study results made me aware of the four basic problems in modern language classes, namely

— insufficient amount of in-class communication due to the factors identified above;

— attaching too much importance to the results of final language tests;

— testing students' language competence primarily by focus-on-forms tests;

— prioritizing teaching to test over teaching to communicate resulting in students' poor com1 municative skills.

6. Limitations in this study

In the study the following limitations need to be considered. Firstly, the sample size was limited to only 24 language teachers and therefore the study results may not be generalized to all the European schools. Secondly, I assumed that all study participants would respond without preconceived biases when completing the survey. For that reason, the study is limited to teacher honesty in response to the survey questions. Also, it needs to be noticed that generalizability is limited due to a homogeneous sample (the majority of teachers were female having a similar teaching experience) as well as time sensitive and natural settings that are subject

to change. Finally, data collection and analysis was limited to a 2-week timeframe. A longer length of time may have improved the depth of thematic analysis.

7. Recommendations

It seems that the objective of modern language teaching is not so much developing communicative competence of learners but rather preparing them to pass final tests. Language policy makers should be informed on this negative trend to develop appropriate instruments (teaching guidelines documents, more flexible curricula, programs, etc.) which would enhance the importance of teaching communication and explain how to test effectively the communicative competence. The data from the survey are appalling considering the fact that the language teachers in the survey have awareness that they do not spend sufficient time on communication and that the proportion of teaching to test prevails over teaching to communicate.

From the analysis of the survey data one can also say that the way the communicative competence is tested should be revised. Frequently the study participants said that they relied on written tests and had to stick to the workbook key. Yet, the communicative competence should be tested not only in a written form but also orally. Moreover, it should be tested not in a sentence context with a ready answer provided in the key but in a wider context involving interaction between interlocutors.

As I have mentioned in "Problem identification" section, academic skills related to foreign language learning (e.g., higher-level thinking skills, memorization of more sophisticated vocabulary) are important for students but social skills (e.g., communication strategies) are far more important since they are essential for communication.

From my own reflective practice as a student teacher trainer at Department of English Studies at Wrocław University I can say that language teachers and sometimes student teachers avoid communicative activities. It is due to the fact that they themselves were taught by means of traditional teaching methods and tend to think that communication means noisy and disorganized classes. A communicative class involves integrated language teaching. It requires a skillful teacher who is able to manage communicative activities in pairs and groups. For many language teachers this perspective is too overwhelming. Thus, they prefer teaching to test in which they usually stick to traditional methods they know and which give them a feeling of security.

Teaching to communicate also requires more student-centered classes in which students make autonomous decisions and take responsibility for learning outcomes. This may be a problem for some teachers who are attached to traditional teacher-centered classes.

From the talks with my colleagues participating in the study presented in the paper I can say that they complained about the lack of motivation of their students. Joanna from Poland used an expression "every year our students are worse and worse in L2 communication." Undoubtedly, teaching to the final language exams via repetitive drills and revision tests produces unmotivated students who may pass exams but often do poorly in real life communication with native or non-native speakers.

Finally, it needs to be stressed that in our rapidly globalizing world the communicative skills seem to be crucial and students need to master CALP (academic) skills and the range of communicative skills not only in English but in a number of foreign languages.

As to the main question included in the topic of the article I would definitely say that modern language teaching should serve both communicative and testing purpose. However, classroom teaching cannot almost entirely focus on preparing students to tests. Revision language tests are necessary for students because in this way they evaluate their weak and strong points in a foreign language. Yet, they should reflect communicative approach to language learning and not focus-on-forms approach.

It seems to me that the best way of testing someone's communicative skills is by exposure to a foreign language in real life situations, preferably in a target language country. It may be achieved by immersion programs which serve as a great motivational tool for students. However, it should be acknowledged that development and testing of communicative skills are also possible in a language classroom on condition teachers prepare activities and language tests which mirror real life situations.

Acknowledgements

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