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Entitled

Task Based Assessment:
Evaluating Communication in the Real World

By
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Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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An Abstract of

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Abstract

The field of second language acquisition (SLA) has accepted the ancient Greek tradition of grammar and the structure of language as a foundation for language acquisition, instruction and assessment (Yngve, 1996). Accordingly, much emphasis has been placed on how well foreign language learners (FLLs) can reproduce sentences that are grammatical. Instructors spend much of their time teaching their students grammatical rules in a fashion that follows current theories of SLA, and even though the theories of SLA have changed slightly the focus has continued to remain on the students learning grammar. Nonetheless, there have been many researchers who question the students’ language ability. Upon such evaluation of the Foreign Language programs, these researchers look at the order of acquisition as a possible cause for the problems FLLs have when learning a foreign language (Pupura, 2004; Gass and Selinker, 2001).
As Yngve (1996, p. 46) points out, the problem lies within the conceptual framework of traditional theoretical linguistics, which assumes that grammar exists in the physical domain or real world. Typically, researchers in the fields of SLA and foreign language instruction have thought of communication as what happens when people use language. This conventional assumption places language (the abstraction) in the center and marginalizes, or at least makes secondary, the people who are communicating (the physical domain reality). This assumption has lead researchers of SLA to focus on the apparent order of acquisition of grammar. Because of this domain confusion, FLLs are not taught to communicate but are taught to talk about a language. Accordingly, FLLs are assessed on how well they know the grammar of a language or on a person’s ability to produce language in a grammatically appropriate manner. This study will examine different instruction methods, either traditional grammatical language instruction, or methods focused on real-world observable communicative behaviors, and the forms of assessment that correspond accurately to the instruction methods, such as traditional testing and task based assessment (TBA).
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Chapter One

Introduction

The current and traditional assessment methods have typically looked at the reproduction of grammar of a target language (Bachman and Palmer, 1996; Canale and Swain, 1980; Gass and Selinker, 2001; Oller, 1979; Purpura, 2004). This is typically done by having students do such things as conjugate verbs from the infinitive form to a different tense or by judging the syntax of a written piece (Oller, 1979; Purpura, 2004). There has also been a tendency to teach the students the meaning of the words of a language by having them translate the word from the native language to the target language. Then the teachers have the students match the word from the target language to the word from the native language. However, many researchers of second language acquisition (SLA) have been questioning the validity of such measures and whether they actually do measure how well a person can communicate.

Contrary to popular beliefs of SLA, where the teacher puts the responsibility of learning mostly on the learner (Purpura, 2004), it should be noted that it is probably the way in which we teach people to communicate and not the order of acquisition of the language that is causing problems. It could also be
asked how we test what the students know. A possible answer to such a question would be to observe the outcome of a communicative event. Therefore, the focus of this study is to determine better assessment practices that actually show what a FLL can do, and consequently better ways in teaching people to communicate in a nonnative setting.

Theoretical Background

In order to better understand what needs to be observed when looking at students’ ability to communicate in a nonnative setting, it is necessary to critically analyze the assumptions behind the traditional and still current views of language. The commonly accepted theory of language first presented in detail by Chomsky (1957) and elaborated in Chomsky (1964) to include an LAD which receives input (the primary linguistic data) that is then processed through the LAD to form a generative grammar, has been one the underlying theories of second language instruction for nearly half a century. This idea, referred to as Transformational Generative grammar, states that language is an infinite set of sentences and is generated by the generative grammar. Chomsky (1964) believed that there is an innate ability to acquire language based on the, “innate specifications of heuristic procedures and built-in constraints on the character of the task to be performed” (p. 26). This is like saying the linguistic input goes into a system inside the brain and a sentence structure is formed. Chomsky later suggests (1968) that all languages are deeply rooted with universal grammar (UG) and that since everyone is equipped with the LAD and UG we are able to acquire a language.
Chomsky’s idea of generative grammar, which has influenced the principles of SLA for quite some time, unfortunately is subjectively determined considering grammar is not observable in the real-world. Chomsky determines the adequacy of data based on three different criteria: observational adequacy, descriptive adequacy, and explanatory adequacy. Here Chomsky assumes that the observations are of real properties. According to Chomsky, such real properties include verbs, subjects and nouns (1964, p. 29, 33). Therefore, Chomsky believes that grammar is objectively observable. However, Yngve (1996) shows us that the traditional theories of language that have grammar as an observable property of people are wrong and that grammar is not a real world observable property of the communicative event.

Krashen (1985) showed that language acquisition is not innate, but does need to be learned. Krashen’s (1985) Input Hypothesis assumes input is bits of language that are heard or read, and are ahead of the learner’s current knowledge of the grammar of the target language (Gass and Selinker, 2001, p. 200). Krashen used the $i+1$ analogy to explain his framework; $i$ here is equivalent to the learner’s current state of grammatical competence. If the input was comprehensible, not too far ahead of the learner’s capability and articulated well, then the FLL would learn a second language. Gass and Selinker (2001, p. 201), when referring to the applications of Krashen’s Input Hypothesis, state:

if input is understood and there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is provided. The teacher need not attempt deliberately to teach the next structure along the natural order—it will be provided in just the right quantities and automatically reviewed if the student receives a sufficient amount of we comprehensible input.
The Input-Hypothesis is partially correct, because it does mention that the learner needs comprehensible input. However, as Klein (1986) shows, the articulations or “linguistic input in the narrower sense” can not be the input. Therefore, we can infer that language can not be in the input. Klein noted that if this were the case, then if we were to be locked in a room with no other input than Chinese was played over a loud speaker, we would be able to speak Chinese:

Suppose you were locked in a room and were continually exposed to the sound of Chinese coming from a loudspeaker; however long the experiment continued, you would not end up speaking Chinese; at most, you might know the parts of the phonological system. What makes learning possible is the information in parallel to the linguistic input in the narrower sense (the sound waves): the learner must know who is speaking to whom, when and where, he must be able to watch the accompanying “body language” (gesture, facial expression, etc.) and he must note the reactions of the listener. Eventually he should be able to establish a relationship between identifiable segments of the sound stream and particular segments of the parallel information (p. 44).

As Klein points out, learning can not take place in such circumstances because there must be more than just the articulations or “linguistic input in the narrower sense”. There must be real-world objects that allow the learner to associate the articulations with a context to obtain meaning, but remember that language (which does not exist in the physical domain) can not be the input. Thus, Krashen contradicts himself because he says that language in the input is made comprehensible by extra-linguistic cues. If this were the case, the Chinese room would still allow for a learner to receive input; it would not be as comprehensible, but since Krashen believes that language is the input and accepts Chomsky’s view of the LAD the learner should still be able to learn a language.
A scientific look at such assumptions made by Chomsky and Krashen show how such assumptions are inadequate. Chomsky and Krashen assume that you can look at language as a real observable property of people and communication. However, since language is not observable in the real world, it can be concluded that their assumptions deem it unnecessary that we look at the real observable behaviors of the people who are communicating to determine meaning. Chomsky and Krashen’s assumptions fall short because they are trying to look at language as if it were in the physical domain and both assume that utterances carry meaning. However, the common assumption of what language is only allows it to exist in the logical domain, where people interpret sounds and behaviors to have certain meanings; the sounds themselves do not carry meaning. Yngve (1996) states that we must observe people communicating in a real-world setting. Therefore, Yngve set up a theoretical framework for looking at the way people communicate in the real world. Yngve defined the communicative event as a linkage which consists of the participants (the people), the settings (the places), the props (the things that are communicated about) and the channels (energy flow). Moreover, we must correlate the spoken sounds and the written texts with the participant’s behaviors and the outcome of the linkage. If we look at the communicative event then we are able to objectively observe what people do, and therefore we know what to teach people about how to communicate in a nonnative setting.
Practices in Teaching

Chomsky’s view of language has been a major influence on the theoretical foundations underlying the way that language is taught. The idea of a generative grammar has become the underlying factor when considering the importance of grammar in language instruction. Although many dispute the fact that Chomsky’s ideas about the LAD and UG are pervasive influencers of their pedagogies, it is clear that this is not the case. Coleman (2005, p. 205) illustrates how researchers of linguistics, SLA, and second language instruction are influenced by Chomsky’s idea that the primary linguistic data is language.

Saleemi (1992), for example, reviews work by Chomsky, Chomsky Miller, Fodor, Pinker, Wexler, and Culicover, in which this assumption is shared. The same assumption is also made explicit by Morgan (1986) and White (1989), among many others. We see it shared throughout most research in SLA, e.g. Cook (1993), Sharwood Smith (1994), Gass and Selinker (2001).… In short, the idea that input for language learning consists of some sort of grammatical ‘data’—and only this—is nearly ubiquitous.

The assumption that language and grammar exist as observable properties is important when seeing why traditional language instruction is flawed. Normally, language is taught as a set of grammar rules and all the learner has to do is plug in the necessary word that complies with the specified grammatical rule. Thus, learners become accustomed to filling out grammar charts and learning how to conjugate verbs. Likewise, they are taught to translate a word from their native language to the target language. Usually, however, words do not translate exactly causing confusion later when the learner is trying to speak with native speakers. It is important to note that some instruction methods do value context, but seldom deviate from such traditional views of language.
For example, communicative language teaching (CLT) moves closer to the goal of teaching a learner how to communicate, but many of the theories that influence the pedagogical goals of teachers who practice CLT still assume that language and communication are different things. In reality this is true, since in fact language does not exist in the real world. But certain assumptions made in this field do assume that language in fact does exist and they still put primary emphasis on learning a language and not directly on the communicative behaviors of a target setting. A quotation from Musumeci (1997, p. 122-123) shows how CLT still focuses on language instruction [emphasis added]:

Unlike eclectic methods that preempt the careful examination of the relationship between classroom practice and learning outcomes, content-based instruction-in which *the second language is used as the medium of communication* for subject matter learning-provides the most well-documented evidence of the second language pedagogy that consistently achieves the goal of producing competent users of the L2.

The problem thus arises where the primary goal of CLT is to teach a language, not the communicative behaviors of the native speakers of a target setting.

The common domain confusion presented by many types of language instruction rests on the principles that there is language and then there is communication, thus assuming that language exists outside of communication. Richards and Rodgers (1986, p. 71) believe that language has a structure and grammatical form, “the *structure of language* reflects its functional and communicative uses” and “the primary units of language are *not merely its grammatical* and *structural features*, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse” [emphasis added]. Here the domain confusion persists because they still believe that there is grammar and
language, and then there is communication. However, as Yngve (1996) points out language does not exist in the real world; there are only the real world properties of the communicative event, i.e., the people, the setting, the props and the channels. Therefore, it is imperative that we put aside the common domain-confused assumptions that language does exist in the real world that are made by researchers of linguistics, SLA, and CLT such as Chomsky (1964), Krashen (1985), Richards and Rodgers (1990), Berns (1990), Savignon (1997), Musumeci (1997), Gass and Selinker (2001), and Purpura (2004).

Some researchers in the field of SLA argue that without grammar the learner is not able to produce comprehensible output. However, it is commonly known that people do not learn their first language by the conscious learning of grammar rules and since grammar exists only by conscious assumption people are not able to unconsciously acquire the knowledge of grammar. Therefore, what people unconsciously learn must be knowledge of something else, such as the communicative behaviors of the target setting. Hence, people learn to communicate with other individuals by observing their behaviors (and other linkage elements) in correlation with the physical sound waves and texts. Therefore, we should teach communication with real-world comprehensible input, not Chomsky’s language-only input idea, but with the physical properties of communication. The students will then learn to communicate the way a native speaker of the target setting does.

In accordance with the aforementioned stance, a distinction must be made between how communication is traditionally seen and how it is defined in this
paper. Savignon (1997) defines communication as “getting our messages across” and further states that communication is “the concern not only of second language teachers but of us all in our lives in whatever language we happen to use” (p. 9). Therefore, the assumption is made that people are both receiving and giving messages while communicating using their language. Despite this understanding, many still believe that the participants engaging in the communicative act need to be producing speech in order for the act to be considered communication. The question can then be raised that addresses someone who can hear, but cannot speak. If, through their nonverbal behaviors we see that they understand what is being said to them during communication, are they not part of the communicative act? The same is true for infants when they are learning how to communicate. The parents of the child are continually giving the child input, showing the child objects, identifying the object using articulations and gestures, asking questions, and giving commands. The infant learns through multiple examples that are provided during the input phase what the articulations are referring to and eventually the infant is able to produce the sounds that were learned to identify the things. Thus we can safely say that two-way speech is not required during communication. People who engage in speech communication can either produce output, or receive input, but the former of the two is not necessary on both sides, because communication consists of the behaviors of the participants, in correlation with the physical sound waves and/or written text.

Teaching communication using real things, showing contrasts between objects and ideas, and giving the learner ample real-world contexts should be the
method when instructing learners to communicate in an unfamiliar setting (Coleman, 2005). For example, when teaching non-native English speakers (NNES) the teacher holds up a bottle and says “this is a bottle”, then the teacher holds up a bottle with different physical properties (maybe it is a green glass bottle instead of a clear plastic bottle) and says “this is a bottle”. The teacher repeats this several times so the students can see how the physical properties of the objects vary but the sounds that describe them are the same. Then the teacher holds up a book and says “this is a book” and then repeats the same process as with the bottle. Now the learner is learning that this is is used when saying what something is, and is also learning the name of the object.

It is necessary to point out that in order for this to be done effectively the FLL must be provided with numerous examples of real objects that allow the learner to associate the speech articulation that the object represents with the possible variation in the objects’ appearance. For example, if a FLL teacher were to teach the learner how to describe a chair, the teacher would need to point to a hard wooden chair and say “this is a chair”; then the teacher would point to a recliner that is soft and considerably larger and say “this is a chair”. Next the teacher would contrast the object by pointing to an object with two seats that is also cushioned and relatively large and say “this is a couch”. This process would continue with the different examples, so the learner would be able to identify the object appropriately.

To illustrate how this could possibly avoid confusion, one only needs to analyze how speakers of Chinese reference a chair. A native speaker of Chinese
would reference a wooden object with one seat as “yizi” which in English would be referred to as a “chair”. However, a native speaker of Chinese would call an object with one seat that is soft a “shafa” and likewise would call an object with two seats that is soft a “shafa”. In English, the former of the two would be called a “chair” and the latter of the two would be called a “sofa” or a “couch” depending on the dialect. Therefore, it is evident that we must show how native speakers can reference many objects with distinct physical characteristics with the same articulation and how objects that may have similar physical characteristics may be referenced with different articulations. Consequently, by providing a breadth of association for the learners (Coleman, 2006), the learners are able to learn to communicate like a native speaker of the target setting.

**Practices in Assessment**

Due to the false assumptions of language that most instruction abides by, assessment has traditionally followed the same criteria for judging how well people know a language on their ability to correctly answer questions related to the grammar of a particular sentence. This is evident even with researchers who wish to make language testing more reliable and more valid,

This means constructing theories of LT (language testing) that are based on current views of SLA theories—assessing more components of language, such as interlanguage variation, language processing, pragmatics, and aspects that address the context, complexity and dynamics of language (Shohamy, 2000, p. 552).

Even though researchers of SLA and LT believe they are looking at people “using language”, they are not really looking at how well people communicate.
Purpura (2004, p. 37) believes that the test developers need to first know the order of acquisition so that they can determine what to test, “what is the order of acquiring the modals, the conditionals, or the infinitives or complements”. Purpura (2004) does not equate accuracy of output (grammatically speaking) with acquisition, but still presupposes that knowing the order of acquisition of language elements is important. It is clear that Purpura (2004) believes that researchers are able to determine the acquisition of grammatical structures; however, since grammar is not a real world object, how could one possibly acquire it and acquire it in a particular order?

In the latter part of the 1970’s, a shift from typical grammar assessment (conjugating a verb given in a sentence) moves to the importance of context. Oller (1979) gives a possible solution to the usual type of grammar assessment, which he defined as pragmatic expectancy grammar. Oller (1979) describes this as a way to assess a learner’s grammatical knowledge by first supplying the learner with a context from a previous text. The learner is supposed to complete a sentence based on the expected grammatical structure and tailor the answer to the text that was given. Purpura (2004, p. 53) argues that Oller did not give a clear definition of what the expectancy grammar was nor did he give a clear definition of how this might show the level of one’s grammatical ability. Other researchers found that many linguists were not taking into account different sociolinguistic components that were necessary when determining a learner’s ability to speak a language in a given context. Purpura (2004, p. 53) discusses Canale and Swain’s (1980) theory of communicative competence “[Canale and
Swain] proposed a model of communicative competence consisting of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence”. However, Canale and Swain (1980) fail to point out how these relate to communicative ability and still judge all of these as separate components of communication.

Canale and Swain’s theory of language competence was critiqued by Bachman and Palmer (1996) who believe language knowledge is more specific. Bachman and Palmer (1996) state that the knowledge of a language consists of two components; the first is how well the learners control the structure of the language when producing utterances and texts, and the second being the learners pragmatic knowledge or utterances/texts that are contextually correct, and how well they communicate (cited in Purpura, 2004, p. 54). These ideas assume that what learners know is the “grammatical structure of a language” and judge whether or not the learners are able to apply their knowledge of the language to a given context. This, like many other ideas, still correlates with Chomsky’s theory, where the linguistic data goes into the LAD and parameters are set during the acquisition stage, and then through output the learner is able to produce a second language. Secondly, Bachman and Palmer believe context to be a relevant factor when a learner decides what needs to be plugged into the system. Still, SLA researchers, such as Purpura (2004, p. 55), argue that the learner may not know the meaning of the different grammatical forms. Here Purpura still has problems with domain confusion because he believes that the meaning lies within the grammatical form, not the speaker and the situation. Therefore, he does not look
directly at the communicative behaviors of the learners and how the behaviors relate to what the learners are saying.

Traditional assessment has sought to determine how well students know the meanings of the grammatical structures and how well they use the grammar. These goals, whether they are achieved during a communicative event or during a traditional test, still do not focus on how well the learner is able to communicate. If we were to assume that language did exist in the physical domain and that people used language to communicate, then these tests would be validly assessing what learners know. Since we know it does not, we should assess learners directly on well they communicate based on the outcome of communicative events. Task based assessment (TBA) is an assessment method that can determine how well the students communicate. Mislevey, Steinber, and Almond (2002, p. 78) note that task based assessment gives a better definition of what a language learner can do:

TBLA [task based language assessment] broadens consideration to the social context of language use (sociolinguistic competence), pragmatic considerations in using language to achieve goals (strategic competence) and familiarity with forms, customs and standards of communication above the level of sentences (discourse competence).

Moreover, although its proponents still refer to language use, TBA can look beyond the simple terms of assessment that still focus on the domain-confused definitions of language use. TBA does so by contextualizing communication, by looking at what actually is occurring in the real-world and by judging how the learner is interacting in the communicative event (Segalowitz, 2000; Byrnes, 2002).
It remains evident, however, that researchers of SLA still seek to determine if the language learner can *use language* when communicating, even when using TBA as an evaluation tool. This creates a problem where the researchers focus on the use of words to accomplish a task. Norris, Brown, Hudson, and Bonk (2002) establish criteria for testing a learner’s language ability by eliciting tasks that see if the learner in question can complete a task based on the use of language. This falls short because they are using an abstract construct such as language to accomplish a real world activity such as ordering a pizza, which is exactly what Norris et al. (2002) seek to determine in their study. Once again domain confusion persists when Norris et al. (2002) try to determine a learner’s understanding of an abstract thing in the real world.

In order to measure one’s native live communicative ability we must first focus on the importance of the communicative event. It is necessary to judge how well the learner can accomplish a particular goal that has been previously determined by the instructor based on previously taught contexts. In order to first judge a learner on communicative ability, the teacher must teach the learner in real-world-like settings. It is imperative that the instructor does not look to TBA if the learner has not been properly taught to communicate. If, for example, the instructor has taught grammar charts and the translation of words, it seems counterintuitive to try to measure how well the learner can communicate. Accordingly, if the instructor has focused on teaching the communicative properties of linkages, then the teacher is able to reliably test what a learner is
able to do. Therefore, an instructor can place the learners in a simulated environment that has been previously taught.

For example, the teacher could give the students the input that is needed when learning how to communicate in a post office. First the teacher would hold up an envelope and say “I have an envelope”, give it to the student and say “you have an envelope”. After providing numerous examples of the objects that are used in a post office and how to reference them, the teacher would demonstrate a simulated interaction that would typically occur in a post office. The interaction would show a postal clerk standing behind the counter and a customer who wanted to use the postal service. First the postal clerk would indicate that the person was to come to the counter for help by saying “Next please” or “Can I help who’s next?” and then either a nonverbal or verbal response would be shown from the person in line. Once the person reaches the counter, the postal clerk would ask “How may I help you?”, then a response would be given by the customer, “I would like to mail this package to China”. The input stage would be shown in its entirety, and then the students would be given the chance to engage in the interaction in the activities stage.

After the input and activities stage, the instructor would determine a goal for the learner: Can the student mail a package to a predetermined destination with the correct shipping detail? The instructor measures the learner’s native-like communicative ability based on the outcome of the event. Therefore, rather than trying to determine if the FLL knows how to talk about grammar, conjugate verbs, or use language correctly, the assessor would try to determine if the FLL is
communicating in a manner that would allow that FLL to interact with a native speaker and accomplish the desired goal. Thus, if the other participant in the linkage was not able to understand the learner and consequently did not mail the package to the desired location with the correct shipping orders, then the communicative event failed. A method such as the one described above can depict a learner’s ability in more difficult situations as well, assuming the learner has been taught appropriately and has been given adequate real-world comprehensible input.

**Hypothesis**

Traditional assessment practices have been able to accurately determine how well a person can decipher the tense of a given sentence and plug in the verb, or other part of speech, in the correct form. Therefore, if we are aiming to determine if a person can communicate in the real world as explained on p. 5, we must use an assessment method that accurately corresponds to the type of instruction the FLLs were given. It could be assumed that someone who is taught grammar will have higher assessment scores on traditional tests versus task based assessment. Likewise, if a student is taught to communicate in the real world in a nonnative setting, it can be assumed that the student will have higher scores on a task based assessment. However, linguists for a long time have judged the grammaticality of a sentence based on a native speaker’s intuition (Carnie, 2007). Therefore, it can be deduced that a non-native speaker, who is given the proper instruction, could possibly develop similar intuitions regarding the grammaticality of a sentence in a second language. In such case, the FLL who is taught to
communicate in the real world in a nonnative setting may be able to do as well as
the FLL who is taught grammar when the two learners are assessed traditionally.

$H_A$: Ss who are given grammar instruction of a second language will
perform better on traditional assessment than on task based assessment.

$H_A$: Ss who are taught communication in a simulated real-world
nonnative setting will perform better on task-based assessment than
traditional assessment.

$H_A$: Ss who are taught communication in a simulated real-world setting
will have a smaller difference between their scores on traditional
assessment and task based assessment than non-native speakers who are
taught grammar.
Chapter Two

Since it is pertinent for foreign language teachers (FLT) to accurately assess their students based on what they are taught, the assessment design for the students must be done in a way that is consistent with the curriculum. Furthermore, because we can show that language does not exist in the physical domain and that it is the properties of the communicative event that should be taught and can be observed, we should evaluate our students on their communicative behaviors. Therefore, our main goal when attempting to evaluate our students should be to see if they can successfully complete a communicative activity in a non-native setting. This chapter will look at a study that shows how FLT's can assess their students on what they are able to do in the real world.

**Input Design**

In order to determine how FLLs learn to communicate in a nonnative setting and then assess their ability, it is imperative to design a task based assessment to determine this ability. To do this it was essential to find a language that was seldom spoken and that had few people that had any level of proficiency within the university community. This was troublesome because a significant portion of the student body population at the University of Toledo were native
speakers of languages other than English. Accordingly, it was inferred that the nonnative speakers of the student body likely possessed the ability to communicate in an English speaking environment, even if their ability to communicate was at a basic level. Therefore, in order to measure the subjects’ ability to learn the communicative behaviors of a nonnative setting, it was imperative to develop a new setting of communicative behaviors in this study that was unknown by any student at the university that might participate. To avoid any confounding variables, it was necessary to create communicative behaviors of a nonnative setting that would not have the possibility of having any native speakers.

In an attempt to systematically create a way to communicate in a nonnative setting, specific articulations in Spanish were changed. Fig. 1a shows the consonant sound change. Fig. 1b shows the vowel sound change.

\[
\begin{align*}
[p] & \rightarrow [f] & [k],[g] & \rightarrow [x] \\
[b] & \rightarrow [v] & [l] & \rightarrow [r] \\
[y] & \rightarrow [b] & [r] & \rightarrow [l] \\
[f] & \rightarrow [p] & [s],[z] & \rightarrow [ć] \\
[y] & \rightarrow [λ] & \\
\end{align*}
\]

Figure 1a—Consonant sound change

\[
\begin{align*}
[i] & \rightarrow [e] & [ei] & \rightarrow [oi] \\
[e] & \rightarrow [a] & [oi] & \rightarrow [au] \\
[a] & \rightarrow [o] & [au] & \rightarrow [eu] \\
[o] & \rightarrow [u] & [eu] & \rightarrow [ou] \\
[u] & \rightarrow [i] & [ou] & \rightarrow [ai] \\
[ai] & \rightarrow [ei] & \\
\end{align*}
\]

Figure 1b—Vowel sound change
In an attempt to make the communicative behaviors less like those in Spanish, the final vowels were dropped from the set of articulations. Because of the removal of the vowel sounds, it was also necessary to change how the native speaker would refer to specific objects using articulations other than just the name for the object. Native speakers of Spanish say *el* and *la* before referencing specific objects being made salient. For example, in Spanish when a speaker is standing near a car not previously mentioned, and the person looks at the car and says “*el coche es muy grande*”. The *el* is used before saying the articulation that refers to a salient object, *coche (car)*. In Ariech, *dac* was arbitrarily created, which allowed the speakers to reference such a salient object in the same way. Next it needed to be determined how the speaker would identify multiple quantities of an object; here the ending *indo* was arbitrarily created, to replace the [s] ending, which is used in Spanish. Thereafter, it was decided not to change the fundamental sequence of articulations that occur when a native speaker of Spanish is referencing actions and the person that is involved in the action, and instead, it was determined that the sound change was sufficient enough to prevent the subjects from being able to determine that this form of communication was closely related to Spanish.

Following completion of the basic design for the sounds of *Ariech*, the input for the lesson that would be used to teach the communicative behaviors of the target setting was designed, as was the traditional grammar based lesson. As previously explained (p. 5), teaching a foreign language should not be done via grammar rules and translation. Therefore, the lesson centered on teaching the communicative behaviors of the nonnative setting focused on showing a person
speaking, the written representation of what was being said, and the real-world objects that the person was referring to.

With the intention of maintaining a consistent source of input with no variation in the objects, the articulations, and the physical behaviors of the person presenting it, the input was prerecorded via a digital video camera and then played for the subjects of the study. Fig. 2 shows the prerecorded input.

Figure 2 — Communicative Input

The communicative input was designed to show the physical relationship of different objects with each other. Therefore, the input showed me name an object, place it in a specific position in relation to another object, and then say the articulation that represented the positioning of the first object and the name of the second object. For example, when putting a book in a trashcan I performed the articulation that refers to a real-world thing, a book, placed it in the trashcan and then said that it was in the trashcan: “Dac rev ačhdo an dac vochil” (‘the book is in the trashcan’). See Appendix 1 for a complete list of the dialog used in the input videos. This process continued, showing different objects and different physical
positions that the objects could have in relation to other objects. For the purpose of this study, it was necessary to keep the variations of objects rather limited, with a focus mostly on the physical relationship of the different objects. However, it should be pointed out that the students will actually learn the names of the objects and their physical relationship with other objects with this method of instruction. Likewise, the Ss will be able to do the things with the various non-real world conceptualizations such as verb conjugations and syntax with this method of instruction.

The other source of input was not prerecorded, because the text-oriented nature of the grammar lesson (see Appendix 2) established the consistency that the communicative approach would not have had. The focus of this input was to see how students performed on TBA in relation to how the Ss who were taught communication performed on the test. This input was given through a traditional lesson where the instructor explained the foreign language and its uses, rather than showing the communicative behaviors of the participants from the target setting. Here the instructor discussed the translations of words, the syntax and the conjugation of verbs. Since only one sequence of articulations was used to show the meaning of existence in relation to the physical positioning of a certain object, or in traditional terminology, a verb, in the first set of input, the grammar lesson also only focused on teaching the conjugation of one verb. In this case, the instructor gave the infinitive form of the verb *achdol*, translated as ‘to be’. Then the instructor showed how to conjugate the verb in the present tense—see Appendix 2. In addition to explaining verb conjugation, the instructor gave the
meaning of different prepositions and explained how they should be used. Accordingly, the instructor gave the name of the objects in the target language and their translation in English. Finally, the instructor briefly explained the syntax of the target language, teaching the students where the preposition goes in relation to the subject and the prepositional phrase in the sentence—see Appendix 2. The entire grammar lesson was taught in English, with the assumption that all of the participants in the study had some level of proficiency.

Assessment Design

As was previously mentioned, providing an assessment that is closely related to the curriculum is vital when determining the progress a student has made throughout the study of a foreign language. Therefore, two different types of assessment were designed that remained consistent with the related instruction: a grammar test and a task-based assessment.

The grammar test was divided into two parts: the first part focused on the subjects’ ability to remember the correct position of a word within a sentence. Fig. 3 shows the first question on the grammar test.

**Directions**: Fill in the missing word that appropriately fits the sentence.
1. Dac ___________ achdon ochalxo dac chup.

Word Key: dac, rofezindo, olevo, an, xiltu, anchemo, chuvla, ochalxo

Figure 3—Sample grammar test item
The second part focused on the students’ ability to remember the word and its English translation. In the first part of the grammar test the Ss were given five questions, each with a missing word. Below the provided questions the Ss were provided a word key, which included eight of the words provided in the lesson, a majority of which had different grammatical functions, see Appendix 3.

Due to time constraints, the Task Based Assessment was limited to having the subjects move objects from one position to another. Therefore, the Ss in this study were not required to reproduce any sounds of Ariech. The Ss were required, however, to understand what the articulations and the written text meant. In order to see how well the Ss understood the input, I photographed the objects used during the input phase with a digital camera and placed them in a booklet that included all of the stationary objects. Next the objects that were manipulated during the input phase were photographed, printed out in color, cut into individual pieces, and using double-sided tape the non-stationary objects were placed below each picture where they were to be moved during the TBA. Each subject was given ten scenarios where the non-stationary objects had to be moved to the desired location in relation to the stationary objects. Above each image of the stationary objects was a sequence of texts that stated where the non-stationary was required to be after it was moved. The texts were written in the same manner as in the input phase, but did not represent the same situations given in the input. Thus, in the input phase there were examples such as Dac farud achdo chuvla dac mach ‘the ball is on the table’ (see Appendix 1), but on the TBA there was Dac farud achdo chuvla dac chup ‘the ball is on the sofa’ (see Appendix 4). This was
done to help distinguish between rote memorization and generalized learning within the Ss. Fig. 4 shows a sample scenario provided in the TBA and diagrams the correct placement of the non-stationary object.

Fig. 4 shows a sofa, and below it is a separate picture of a football. The texts above the image states in Ariech, ‘the ball is on the table’. Thus, the S is required to move the object onto the sofa. For a complete list of the scenarios used in the TBA see Appendix 4. Before the test, Ss were shown what they were supposed to do with the non-stationary object.

Subjects

The participants in this study were undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Toledo. The Ss were enrolled in Composition, Composition for NNES, Introduction to Linguistics, History of English, and Syntax. The Ss’
participation in the study was voluntary and they were not given a reward. A total of 84 Ss participated in the study, including 11 graduate students and 73 undergraduate students.

In order to have an even distribution of the Ss sampled in the study, the courses were chosen based on the assumed level of language learning experience. Ss chosen from the Composition course for native speakers were assumed to have less language learning experience than Ss chosen from Composition courses for NNES, due to the fact that the NNES fluently speak a language other than English. The Ss chosen from Introduction to Linguistics, History of English, and Syntax, were as a group presumed to have a higher level for understanding on how to learn a foreign language.

**Procedure**

Each group of Ss was taught Ariech with only one teaching method and the duration of both instruction methods was approximately ten minutes. After the grammar input was given to the Ss, they were given approximately two minutes to study before they had to take the test. The Ss that were taught via the communication method were not given time to study, since they were required to watch what was occurring in the real world. It is important to mention that taking notes in this situation and then studying them before the test would usually be thought to help the students’ outcome on the test; however it seemed unnecessary since the Ss who were taught communication were given multiple examples of the input. Consequently, the Ss who were taught with the traditional method had extra time before taking the tests.
Before the assessment was given to the Ss, the process that they were to follow during the tests was explained. First it was explained that the Ss were required to move the non-stationary objects to a position in relation to the stationary objects that was indicated by the sentence assigned to each question. Then it was explained that during the grammar test they were required to fill in the blank, as they would in a traditional test. After the process was explained, it was stated that the Ss were not allowed to refer to the opposing section of the test for help answering the given question. The total time given to the Ss to take the test was approximately ten minutes.

**Data Collection**

Each test booklet had a total of 20 questions overall. For the TBA the outcome of each problem was judged on the position of the non-stationary object in relation to the stationary object. If the object was not in the desired position, one point was deducted from the overall points allotted to the TBA. For the grammar assessment the outcome of each problem was judged on whether the Ss wrote the correct word in the blank. Points were not deducted for spelling, but if the word had little or no similarity to the word that was expected to be in the blank one point was deducted from the overall score of the grammar test. For the vocabulary portion of the grammar test, points were not deducted if the S put in a word that could refer to the same object. For example, if the S wrote “football” instead of “ball” for the word *farud* no points were taken off.
Chapter Three

Results

The data instrument was designed to determine which assessment had the best results in accordance with the different types of instruction methods. Each booklet had a total number of 20 questions, with 10 questions for each assessment type. Because the data was not certain to be interval level, the data was analyzed through a frequency test to determine if the skewness and kurtosis of the two groups was within -2 and +2 bounds.

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<th>Statistics</th>
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<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Kurtosis</td>
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<td>.520</td>
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</table>

Figure 5 — Results for determining level of Data

The results for the TBA and Traditional test, shown in Fig. 5, shows that the skewness of -.576 and -.113 were within the bounds, respectively. Likewise, the
results for the TBA and the Traditional test show that the kurtosis of .009 and -.862 were within the bounds, respectively.

Next the data was tested for normality of distribution using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test. In order to determine if the test distribution is normal, and thus indicating that the data can be treated at interval level, the p-value must be greater than .05. The p-values for the K-S tests performed on the TBA and the Traditional Test were .238 and .128 respectively, indicating that the distribution of the data was normal.

Once the level of the data was determined to be interval, the first $H_A$ that states non-native speakers who are given grammar instruction of a second language will perform better on traditional assessment than on TBA was tested using an independent t-test. The results show that there is a significant difference between the scores on the types of test for those given grammar instruction ($t=2.132$, d.f.=$79.146$, $p=0.036$). Therefore, the results indicate that we must reject the $H_0$. We can clearly see that the mean of the traditional test for the Ss was 4.67, whereas the mean of the TBA for was 5.88., within the grammar instruction group.

Fig. 6 shows that those who were taught grammar did not have a higher score on the traditional test than those who were taught with the real–world communicative approach.
Fig. 6 also shows that the Ss who were taught with the real-world communicative approach had a much higher score on the TBA than the Ss who were taught with the grammar approach.

Based on the results of another independent t-test we are able to accept the HA that states the Ss who are taught communication in a simulated real-world setting will perform better on TBA than on traditional assessment. The results were very significant (t=3.647, d.f.=82, p=0.000). This shows us that if the Ss are taught to communicate in a non–native setting, then TBA is the best way to evaluate their communicative abilities in a nonnative setting.

An independent t–test shows us that we must reject the third HA, which states that Ss who are taught communication in a non-native setting will have a smaller difference between their scores on traditional assessment and task based assessment than Ss who are taught grammar. For this data analysis the difference of the means between the two assessment methods, TBA and traditional test, was tested against the instruction methods, real-world communicative approach and grammar approach. The results shows that the difference between the means is not significant (t=.297, d.f.=82, sig. =.767).

<table>
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Although the third $H_A$ has to be rejected, it is clear that the Ss obtained a higher score when being taught to communicate in a non-native setting in comparison to being taught grammar. We can see that the means for those who received the real world instruction ($\bar{x}_{TBA}=7.66, \bar{x}_{TRADTEST}=5.85$) are much higher than the means for those that received grammar instruction ($\bar{x}_{TBA}=5.88, \bar{x}_{TRADTEST}=4.67$). Therefore, it is fair to say that students not only perform better on TBA than on traditional tests, but they also perform better when given instruction that focuses directly on teaching the real-world communicative behaviors of a non-native setting.
Chapter Four

Summary of Findings

The results from the statistical analysis done in Chapter 3 allow us to draw the following conclusions regarding TBA and traditional assessment. The Ss who were taught grammar did not perform better on the traditional test than they did on TBA, but surprisingly the reverse was true. The Ss who were taught the real-world communicative behaviors of a nonnative setting performed significantly better on TBA than they did on the traditional test. Even though there was no significant difference in the difference of the means of TBA and traditional assessment tested against the two different instruction methods, the real-world communicative approach and the grammar approach, those that were taught the real-world communicative behaviors of the nonnative setting performed significantly higher on both tests than those that were taught with a grammar based approach.

Although the results of this study are very significant and do show essentially what I was expecting to find, one possible flaw with this study could be that it embodies what is called the Teacher-Method Paradox. Going into this study I had a preconceived notion of how foreign languages should be taught, that
is, by showing the real-world communicative behaviors of the nonnative setting. Therefore, my research design was centered on how to measure communicative abilities in comparison with measuring how well nonnative speakers do on traditional tests. Since my interests coincide heavily with my original hypotheses, it could be possible that the attitude that I demonstrated during the instruction of the real-world communicative behaviors and the grammatical terminology was significantly different, thus becoming an intervening variable. However, in a circumstance where the researcher is in direct contact with the Ss it is difficult not to have bias during the experiment. A possible solution for such a problem could be to have a colleague teach the lesson, therefore removing the researcher from the experiment. This is problematic as well because the colleagues’ bias would have inevitably become an intervening variable. Likewise, they may not have taught the methods in the way that I had originally desired. Therefore, it would be impossible to completely avoid the problem of Teacher-Method paradox with such an experiment, because there is no other way to directly compare the effects of the two treatments.

Another potential flaw that may have occurred during the experiment and that could have caused the results to come out in favor of one method of instruction over another could have been the learning and studying time that the Ss were given prior to the assessment. During the study the Ss who were taught the real world communicative behaviors of the nonnative setting were given a little less than ten minutes of input. They were then required to immediately take the test with no time given to them to study. The Ss who were taught grammar
were given ten minutes of instruction time, and then were given about two and a half minutes to study before the tests. Some might argue that the Ss who were taught grammar were not given enough time to study before the tests. However, it can be inferred that if the Ss were taught the real-world communicative behaviors of the nonnative setting they would not need any study time because they were actually learning during the input stage. Therefore, it may be the case that teaching grammar does not allow the learner to learn as much during the input phase and requires that the learner spend more time out of class learning. Furthermore, it can be deduced that teaching the real-world communicative behaviors of the nonnative setting is—from the student’s point of view—more economical and yields faster results than the grammar based approach.

Despite the findings some still might argue that it is important for non-native speakers to be able to speak grammatically. This argument is flawed, however, because this assumes that language and grammar exist in the physical domain. It is clear that this is not the case, because what really exist in the real world are the properties of the communicative event, i.e., the participants, the setting, the props and the means of energy flow, not language and grammar (Yngve, 1996). Accordingly, it seems paradoxical to believe that grammar testing can actually measure one’s ability to communicate, since in fact it only evaluates if the learner can remember arbitrary things about the abstractions of language and grammar. If one does believe that teaching grammar is the best way to teach a foreign language, it is clear that the scores of TBA are higher than traditional assessment methods, which may indicate that the Ss were able to actually apply
what they learned in a real-world setting. If one does believe that grammar is a real observable thing, it is clear that those who are taught the real-world communicative abilities of the nonnative setting actually have more competence when doing grammar tests than the Ss who were taught grammar. It should be noted, however, that it is not grammatical knowledge that the nonnative speakers learned, but rather they learned to communicate like native speakers of the target setting which allowed them to develop an intuition of what is acceptable in that setting and what is not acceptable.

**Implications**

The results of this study show the increasingly pertinent issue of foreign language instruction and its foundational flaws. It is evident based on these findings that the Ss who were taught grammar performed significantly worse than subjects that were taught the real-world communicative behaviors of the nonnative setting. Because of the obvious flaws of teaching language, and thus grammar, foreign and second language curricula need to stress teaching the communicative behaviors of a nonnative setting.

Despite the fact that most foreign language curricula stress the importance of context when teaching a foreign language, curricula are still designed with a focus on language and grammar. The concern is nevertheless problematic because educators look for competence focusing on language use. While researchers in fields such as SLA and CLT are committed to teaching the students to communicate, they inevitably look for how the second language is used during
communication. This domain confusion allows teachers to look for grammatical competence in contexts, thus evaluating the students’ language usage. Many of the foreign and second language pedagogies, and the concurrent assessment methods, do not determine how well the students are communicating in a nonnative setting, because they assume that language exists in the real world and that it is a thing that can be used. Since language does not exist in the physical domain, we cannot look at its use. We must look at the outcome of the communicative event to see if the learners have actually been able to learn the behaviors that the native speakers perform during communication.

The value of TBA can be extended beyond its commonly perceived uses. It is clear that some see TBA as a way to demonstrate a learner’s oral proficiency. However, this alone is inefficient because it only looks at whether or not the student can give output. Speaking, however, is only a portion of communication, actually understanding what the sounds and the written text mean during the communicative act is also a significant portion of communication. Therefore, TBA can be designed to determine if the nonnative speakers actually understand the behaviors of the communicative event by seeing if they can accomplish tasks, follow directions, and act the way a native speaker would in a similar situation. Moreover, I have demonstrated how feasible creating TBA is and how extensive the breadth of application can be. For example, a teacher can play an audio recording that gives directions, if the students follow the directions properly then they completed the communicative task. With a computer, the teacher can design scenarios similar to the ones that I used for this study, but they can be far more
complex and provide an extremely large amount of contexts to test the individuals. If the teacher wants to determine how well a student can use speech to communicate, the student can record answers to questions, give directions, or give descriptions that would allow the teacher to determine if the nonnative speaker was communicating effectively.

Task based assessment proves to be a more effective way of evaluating students’ communicative abilities in a nonnative setting. Despite the fact some view TBA as an impractical assessment method; this study shows the feasibility of assessing a student’s communicative ability in large groups, not just in a one-on-one situation, and shows that TBA can be done in practical situations. Consequently, this study allows us to draw two conclusions. The first is that grammar instruction is an ineffective method of teaching if the teacher’s goal for the students is for them to learn to communicate like a native speaker of the target setting. Secondly, this study shows that to measure a students’ ability to communicate in a nonnative setting it is necessary to give the students TBA.
References


Appendix 1: Texts that Accompanied Videos used for Communicative Input

English translations are provided here but did not appear with the videos.

1. Dac farud achdo an dac vochil. (the ball is in the garbage can)
2. Dac ball achdo chuvla dac mach. (the ball is on the table)
3. Dac farud achdo chuvla dac rev. (the ball is on the book)
4. Dac rofezindo achdon ovaju dac mach. (the pens are under the table)
5. Dac rofezindo achdon chuvla dac mach. (the pens are on the table)
6. Dac rofez achdo chuvla dac rev. (the pen is on the table)
7. Dac rev achdo ochalxo dac romfel. (the book is next the lamp)
8. Dac romfel achdo ochalxo dac rev. (the lamp is next to the book)
9. Dac rev achdo ovaju dac romfel. (the book is under the lamp)
10. Dac rev achdo an dac vochil. (the book is in the garbage can)
11. Dac romfel achdo chuvla dac rev. (the lamp is on the book)
12. Dac romfel achdo olevo dac rev. (the lamp is over the book)
13. Dac romfel achdo chuvla dac mach. (the lamp is on the table)
14. Dac rev achdo olevo dac mach. (the book is above the table)
15. Dac xitlu achdo olevo dac chup. (the picture is above the chirun)
16. Dac xiltu achdo anchemo da folat. (the picture is on the wall)
17. Dac farud achdo chuvla dac chirun. (the ball is on the chair)
Appendix 2: Grammar lesson

Verb Conjugation

• The present tense regular verb endings of Ariech are:

Sing. Plural
1st Per.-oj 1st Per-omuch
2nd Per-och 3rd Per-on
3rd Per-o

• The word in Ariech for ‘to be’ is Achdol.

• The root of the verb is ‘Achd’

• Present tense endings of ‘Achdol

Singular Plural
1st Per.-Achdoj 1st Per.-Achdomuch
2nd Per.-Achdoch 3rd Per.-Achdon
3rd Per.-Achdo

• When speaking of an object in a particular position the speaker would say

“Dac farud achdo chuvla dac mach “The ball is on the table”

Here Achdol is conjugated in the 3rd Person Singular.

• When speaking of more than one object in a particular position the speaker would say

“Dac rofezindo achdon chuvla dac mach” “The pens are on the table”

Here Achdol is conjugated to the 3rd person plural.
Prepositions

• In Ariech prepositions come after the Verb and before the noun.
  – Prepositions include:
    • Chuvla-on
    • Ochalxo-next to
    • Ovaju-under
    • Anchemo-on (i.e. on a wall or writing on paper)
    • Olevo-above
    • An-in (i.e. inside of an object)

Plural endings

• In Ariech all nouns that are plural receive the plural ending –indo.
  – Rofez- Pen
  – Rofezindo- Pens
  – Farud-Ball
  – Farudindo-Balls
  – Mach-table
  – Machindo-tables

Articles

• In Ariech all nouns of inanimate objects are preceded by the article ‘Dac’, which means the in English.
  – Dac farud- the ball
  – Dac folat- the wall
– Dac xiltu- the painting

Vocabulary

- farud → ball
- vochil → garbage can
- rev → book
- mach → table
- romfel → lamp
- chup → sofa
- rofèz → pen
- xitlu → painting
- folat → wall
- chirun → Chair

Examples of Ariech

- Dac rev achdo chuvla dac chup. The book is on the couch.
- Dac rofèz achdo ovaju dac mach. The pen is under the table.
- Dac farud achdo an dac vochil. The ball is in the garbage can.
- Dac xiltu achdo anchemo dac folat. The picture is on the wall.
Appendix 3: Grammar Assessment

Directions: Fill in the missing word that appropriately fits the sentence.

1. Dac ___________ achdon ochalxo dac chup.
2. Dac xiltu achdo ___________ dac folat.
3. Dac farud achdo ___________ dac vochil.
4. Dac romfel achdo chuvla _______ mach.
5. Dac rev achdo ___________ dac chirun.

Word Key: dac, rofezindo, olevo, an, xiltu, anchemo, chuvla, ochalxo

Directions: Give the corresponding English or Ariech word in order to fill in the blank.

1. Romfel=__________
2. Rofez=____________
3. ______________=ball
4. Chup=____________
5. ______________=wall
Appendix 4: Task Based Assessment

Directions: Place the moveable object in accordance with the written text.

1. Dac rev achdo chuvla dac mach.

2. Dac xiltu achdo olevo dac romfel.
3. Dac rofez achdo ochalxo dac vochil.

4. Dac farud achdo chulva dac chup.

5. Dac xiltu achdo olevo dac chirun.
6. Dac rofezindo achdon ovaju dac chirun.

7. Dac rev achdo an dac vochil.

8. Dac vochil achdo ochalxo dac mach.
9. Dac xiltu achdo ovaju dac xiltu.

10. Dac rofez achdo chuvla dac chup.