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**SUMMARY OF TESTS TO DETERMINE THE LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT
OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMPETENCE OF STUDENTS
IN THE UNITED STATES**

The improvement of the assessment of students' knowledge and skills is of great significance for foreign language teachers. Various forms, ways, and methods are used to measure academic achievement. Tests are considered to be one of the most effective measuring instruments to evaluate foreign language skills.

It is necessary to note that the construction and administering of tests require adherence to certain rules. The test should be locally standardized, valid in terms of content (i.e., cover in a generalized form the entire content of an instructional unit). All the tasks should be well balanced and equally difficult. Time for writing the test should be limited. Tasks should be contextual and stimulate students to speak, read, listen, and write in a foreign language; they also should be clear, brief, and well constructed. Equally important is to make sure that the test asks students to work across the four language skills.

Foreign language tests in American comprehensive schools are aimed at measuring the level of the development of student's communicative competence, which consists of language, speech, and sociolinguistic components. This task can be fulfilled only by integrating all four language skills addressed in corresponding test items/sections (reading, writing, listening, and speaking assignments). For this reason, the content of the test depends on the language skill intended to be measured by the test [10; 1; 2].

Many domestic and foreign scholars dedicated their works to the research into the

content of foreign language tests in the U.S. educational establishments. J. W. Pellegrino, N. Chudowsky, R. Glaser, J. C. Alderson, C. Clapham, D. Wall, A. A. Harrison, C. Weir, A. Hughes, J. A. Arter, K. U. Dusick, J. B. Brown, M. L. O'Malley, M. Canale, M. Swain, F. Smith, and N. Underhill argue that the content of test items depends on the language skill that is measured by means of the test. M. Cole, S. Scribner, P. Freire, D. Macedo, C. Hill, K. Parry, P. H. Johnston, et al. study the content of reading tests. A. H. Urquhart, C. Weir, C. Y. Leung emphasized that the texts employed to measure reading skills should be authentic. C. Hill, K. Parry, P. H. Johnston, and F. Smith describe the genres of texts used in tests. The peculiarities of writing tasks are studied by G. Valdes, P. Haro, and M. P. E. Arriarza. G. Conlan, A. Cumming, R. Kantor, D. Powers, T. Santos, C. Taylor, D. Fader, W. Grabe, R. B. Kaplan, B. Kroll, et al. dedicated their research to defining the types of writing tasks. J. B. Heaton, J. C. Alderson, C. Clapham, D. Wall, A. A. Harrison, and C. Weir give special attention to listening tasks, whereas L. Hamp-Lyons, B. Kroll, et al. address their content.

In modern society, it is the quality of education that can ensure a better quality of life and vocational competence of the person, which would meet the requirements of the individual, society, and state in the development of human potential. The quality of education is a multi-faceted category with complex structure, which requires holistic and system research. The measurement of students' academic achievements is of great importance especially in view of the fact that learning should lead not only to the acquisition by students of the sum of knowledge and skills, but to the formation of their competence as a self-ability to take optimum actions. Ukraine's European integration aspirations prompt the emergence of new requirements to the means and methods of teaching/learning in accordance with the Bologna Declaration. To meet these requirements, certain measures have to be undertaken to enhance the above-mentioned means and methods, which will bring national education and science closer to European standards.

For this reason, the purpose of this research is to analyze the content and the peculiarities of the selection of test items intended to measure academic achievements in foreign languages. For the information to be accurate, it is important to measure all four language skills: reading, speaking, listening, and writing. We shall, therefore, review the content of each language skill section as featured in the tests used in the American classrooms.

It is worthwhile to note that these tests can be oral or written, i.e., oral section measures speaking skills, whereas written one tests reading, writing, and listening skills.

Scholars emphasize that the purpose of the tests measuring foreign language *reading* skills in the U.S. educational system is to obtain information on the timed/paced comprehension of authentic texts (from newspapers, journals, books, brochures, booklets, the Internet, or newsletters) by the student, which allows the instructor to evaluate student's strengths and weaknesses in this area [11, p. 146]. There are 2 types of texts for reading:

1) intended for extensive reading, which include:

a) skimming, which allows to determine student's ability to extract the main content, idea, type, topic, purpose, and structure of the text,

b) reading for details, and

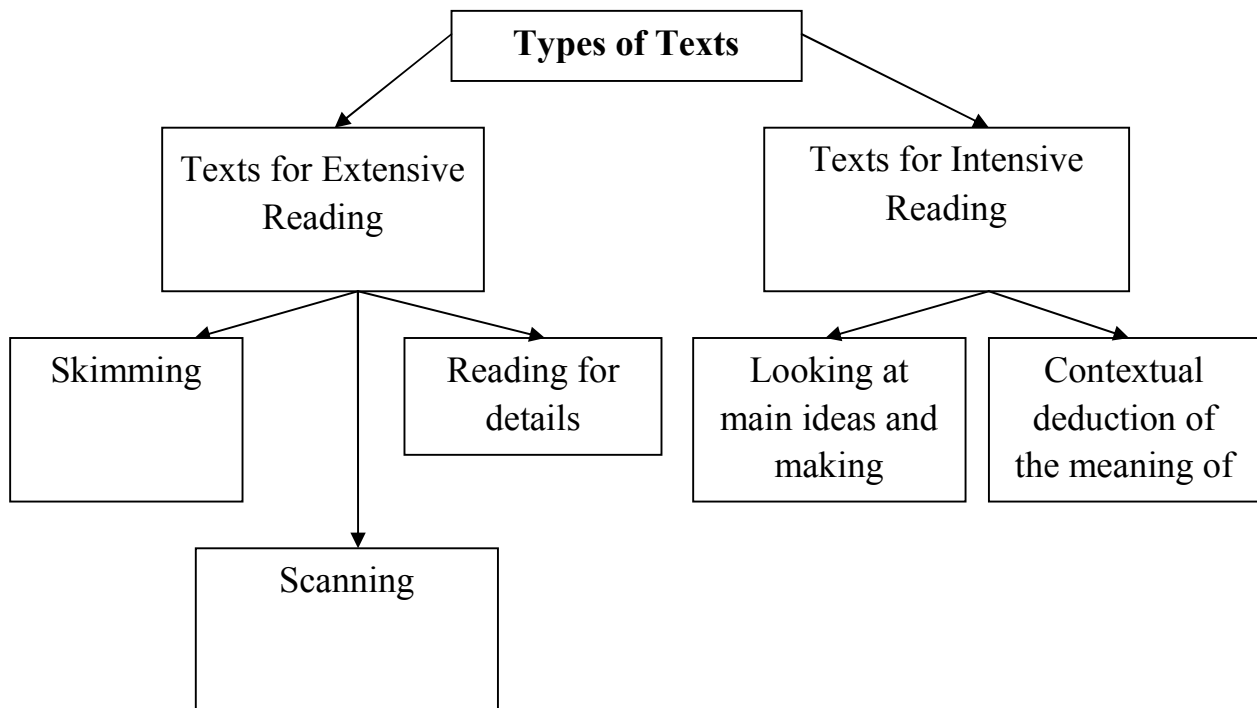
c) scanning, in which some predetermined information is sought after [3, p. 135],

2) intended for intensive reading,

a) looking at main ideas and making inferences, and

b) contextual deduction of the meaning of new words in order to learn them [7, p. 22].

The organization chart below illustrates the above-mentioned types:



The analysis of foreign literature sources proves that the texts used to measure reading skills can be of different genres: descriptive, informative, expository, argumentative, instructive, and fictional. The table below illustrates the above-mentioned genres:

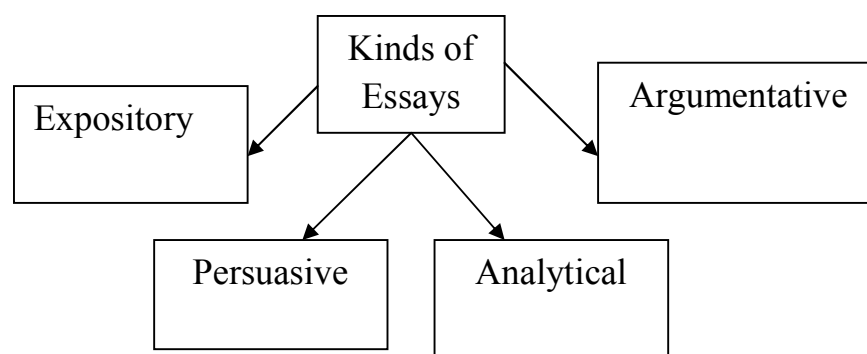
Text Types		Examples
Descriptive	– description of impressions; – technical description.	– trip impressions; – handbook.
Informative	– brief narrative texts; – stories based on real facts.	– short stories, tales, jokes; – report, biographic data, latest news, and historical events.
Expository	– explication; – plan; – resume; – pragmatic texts;	– newspaper articles, teaching materials, introductions to books, thesauruses, and encyclopedias; – forewords.

	– translations.	
Argumentative	– comments.	– latest news, letters to the editorial office, forewords to books/movies, and editorials.
Instructive	– personal instructions; – practical instructions; – statutory instructions.	– signs, messages; – recipes, technical instructions; – rules, recommendations, and orders.
Fictional	– literature in prose; – poetry.	– short stories, legends, and sagas; – songs and poems.

The analysis of the sources suggests that reading comprehension can be assessed by means of: multiple-choice, short answer, and true/false questions, completing unfinished sentences, filling in diagrams, and matching [3; 7]. The difficulty level of texts should measure up to students' skills, which, in its turn, determines the number of words in the text, grammatical structure of the sentences, and preparation time.

The next aspect of our research is *writing tasks* aimed to define the strengths and weaknesses of student's communicative competence, i.e., to evaluate language skills by means of writing tasks. According to G. Valdes, P. Haro, and M. P. E. Arriarza [12, p. 150], the teachers of comprehensive schools in the USA tend to use learning situations that are close to real life and work situations.

The analysis of TOEFL, DELE, and DILF, as well as some publications [8] allowed us to distinguish three types of test items: sentence transformations, short messages, and essays. Essays can be expository, persuasive, analytical, and argumentative [4, p. 115; 6, p. 82].



According to G. W. Pellegrino, N. Chudowsky, R. Glaser [10, p. 160], the purpose of writing tasks is to evaluate students' linguistic and grammar skills, as well as the ability to express ideas, make conclusions and propositions. In order to receive reliable information on the level of the development of students' knowledge and skills in writing, tasks should be based on the real life situations: writing letters, poems, and stories, preparing brochures and manuals, filling in questionnaires, keeping personal diaries, etc. The model of the writing test can be presented in the following way:

Intention / Aim	Kind of activity / Kind of text
1. Expression of emotions / feelings	Short story, personal diary, letter, brochure
2. Briefing	Report, questionnaire, directions, technical manual
3. Persuasion / convincing	Expressing personal opinion, handing in an application, writing a letter to offer advice
4. Writing fiction	Completing a story, writing a short story
4. Maintaining relationships	Postcards, letters, e-mails

According to B. Kroll [9, p. 98], each writing task consists of the head (explaining how to do the exercise) and prompting (giving the right direction to student's thought).

Listening tasks are aimed to evaluate students' listening skills to comprehend authentic texts, i.e., to understand their content and main ideas and to select important information and details. American textologists give preference to press releases and mass-media reports, advertisements, instructions, directions, telephone conversations, dialogues, interviews, lectures, etc [1, p. 110].

The analysis of scientific literature [5] reveals that listening tasks consist of the instruction to each task, guidelines, time limit, and the text itself, which is to be presented twice. The texts in the forms of audio files should allow for pauses for student to be able to read guidelines and tasks.

The analysis of the listening test items, contained in the test materials of TOEFL, DELE, and DILF, revealed that materials used in the listening section are mostly authentic texts that are close to real situations taking place in different spheres of human life. These texts are usually the recorded speech of native speakers. Level of lexical and grammatical difficulty, the length of the text, and the number of tasks vary in accordance with the expected learning outcomes, as well as students' age and social background.

Speaking tests are aimed to encourage students to speak, which can be achieved by means of such tasks as sustaining conversations, preparing reports, conducting discussions and interviews, participating in role-plays, describing something, filling in questionnaires, placing students in the situations when they have to make instant decisions, answering questions, giving instructions/directions, retelling stories heard or read, making expositions, etc. Such a wide range of speaking tasks allows American teachers to obtain reliable information on students' knowledge and skills during the evaluation of their speaking competence.

As a rule, two examiners administer this type of tests. While one of them conducts the examination, communicating with the student, the other acts as an observer, taking notes and grading student's answers. This procedure of testing is known as the

interlocutor scheme. It has been well received by testologists and is used in the most reputable examination systems [10, p. 125]. The content of test items depends on the topic and the form chosen for oral conversation.

The topics explored in speaking tests vary in accordance with age, current instructional unit the class is working on, and the kind of testing. The following topics are common: personal details; place where I live, my neighborhood; everyday life; leisure time, entertainment; travelling; relationships; health and body care; education; shopping; food and drinks; services; places; language; and weather. The aforementioned topics are further divided into subtopics. The range of topics is quite wide; it covers all spheres of human life and encourages students' self-development and learning.

Thus, working on the development of linguodidactic texts, American testologists intend to measure students' foreign language communicative skills in the context of everyday life, i.e., in four spheres of human activity: public, vocational, educational, and private.

The research revealed that the content of test items is designed to encourage students to learn foreign language capitalizing on all four kinds of language skills. It has been proved that the purpose of tests is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of students' communicative competence. A wide range of test assignments allows American teachers to get valid information on students' foreign language knowledge and skills.

The analysis of scientific literature indicated that among the essential conditions of ensuring the efficiency of testing are the following: adhering to the procedures and steps of test development, determining the parameters of the quality of tests: validity, reliability, authenticity, interactivity, impact, usability; and adherence to the rules of administering tests: equality, respect and honesty, which are considered essential for U.S. citizens. It is worthwhile to note that reading, listening, and writing tests usually go

with answer sheets, whereas speaking tests are administered in the form of a dialogue between the teacher and the student.

The conducted research does not cover all the aspects of this issue. The following questions continue to be significant and should be further studied: application scope of foreign language testing in the secondary school system of Ukraine and ways of supplementing Ukrainian foreign language textbooks for secondary schools with tests.

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Грабар Е. В. Зміст тестових завдань із визначення рівня сформованості іншомовної компетенції школярів США

Проблема вдосконалення оцінки знань і контролю навичок та вмінь учнів для вчителів іноземних мов сьогодні є надзвичайно актуальним. Для перевірки успішності засвоєння матеріалу використовують різні форми, методи та прийоми контролю. Одним із найефективніших засобів контролю в навчанні іноземної мови є тест, який і став об'єктом нашого дослідження. У статті розглянуто зміст тестових завдань, представлених чотирма видами мовленнєвої діяльності – читання, говоріння, слухання, письмо, які використовують учителі іноземних мов у середніх навчальних закладах США.

Метою проведення тестового контролю рівня сформованості іншомовних навичок і вмінь учнів із *читання* в освітній системі США є отримання інформації про сприйняття й розуміння учнем автентичних текстів протягом визначеного терміну. Тестування з *письма* передбачає діагностику сильних і слабких сторін комунікативної компетенції учня, тобто оцінювання навичок і вмінь використання мови засобами письма. Тести з *аудіювання* спрямовані на визначення рівня розуміння основного змісту текстів, виокремлення важливої інформації, вирізнення головних ідей, деталей. Тест із *говоріння* має на меті спонукати учня до

спілкування за допомогою дискусії, доповідей, обговорень, інтерв'ю тощо. Отже, широкий спектр завдань дозволяє вчителям отримати валідну інформацію про рівень знань, умінь і навичок учнів з іноземної мови.

Ключові слова: зміст тестових завдань, текст, валідність, читання, письмо, аудіювання, говоріння, комунікативна компетенція.

Грабар Э. В. Содержание тестовых заданий по определению уровня сформированности иноязычной компетенции школьников США

Вопрос совершенствования оценки знаний и контроля навыков и умений учащихся для учителей иностранных языков сегодня является чрезвычайно актуальным. Для проверки успешности усвоения материала используют различные формы, методы и приемы контроля. Одним из наиболее эффективных средств контроля в обучении иностранному языку является тест, который и стал объектом нашего исследования. В статье рассмотрено содержание тестовых заданий, представленных четырьмя видами речевой деятельности – чтением, говорением, слушанием, письмом, которые используют учителя иностранных языков в средних учебных заведениях США.

Целью проведения тестового контроля уровня сформированности иноязычных навыков и умений учащихся по чтению в образовательной системе США является получение информации о восприятии и понимании учеником аутентичных текстов в течение определенного периода времени. Тестирование по письму предполагает диагностику сильных и слабых сторон коммуникативной компетенции учащегося, т. е. оценку навыков и умений использования языка средствами письма. Тесты по аудированию направлены на определение уровня понимания основного содержания текстов, выделение важной информации, главных идей, деталей. Цель теста по говорению – побудить ученика к общению с помощью дискуссии, докладов, обсуждений, интервью и т. п. Следовательно, широкий спектр задач позволяет учителям получить валідную інформацію об уровне знань, умінь і навичок учасників по іноземному мові.

Ключевые слова: содержание тестовых заданий, текст, валидность, чтение, письмо, аудирование, говорение, коммуникативная компетенция.

Hrabar E. V. Summary of Tests to Determine the Level of Development of Foreign Language Competence of Students in the United States

The improvement of instructional assessment is of topical significance for foreign language teachers nowadays. A variety of forms, methods, and techniques are used to measure academic performance. One of the most effective means of instructional assessment in the foreign language learning is testing, which is the subject of our study. This article deals with the test content aimed at measuring academic performance in reading, speaking, listening, and writing as used by American foreign language secondary school teachers.

Testing of students' foreign language reading skills in the American educational system is aimed to get information on the students' comprehension of authentic texts over a determined period of time. The purpose of writing tasks is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of students' communicative competence, i.e. to evaluate students' use of language skills when writing. Listening tasks are aimed to determine the level of the comprehension of the text content, distinguishing important information, main ideas, and supporting details. Speaking tests are intended to encourage students' engagement in communication with the help of discussions, debates, interviews, reports, etc.

Thus, a wide range of test assignments allows American teachers to get valid information on the level of the students' foreign language knowledge and skills.

Key words: test content, text, validity, reading, writing, listening, speaking, communicative competence.

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