

INTRINSICALLY MOTIVATING TESTS : AN OXYMORON?

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Foreign language teaching in universities, like other disciplines is dependent upon the continuous evaluation of its students. Testing of language skills traditionally utilizes line item multiple choice questions types due to its ease of administering and evaluation. Students often view such examinations with a combination of anxiety and disinterest, rarely retaining any learning benefits. In addition, such test types do not get at all the skills acquired in spoken language classrooms. A different testing method is required which both adequately evaluates students' oral English proficiency, and raises students' interest in learning the language. Tests that are both motivating and serve the administrative interests of the institution and the students should be the goal of all English language classes.

Key words : Intrinsic, Motivation

INTRODUCTION

Tests are part of our life in the educational world. In every learning experience we have to pause and put our mental processes to the best use to demonstrate to ourselves and others our accumulated knowledge. Tests can serve positive aims, providing feedback on students' progress towards specified goals. However, in recent years, tests have been seen as something negative by learners, instigating anxiety as our students anticipate difficult questions and not making the grade.

Can tests be positive experiences? Can they be confidence builders and intrinsically motivating? Can they bring out the best in students? Can they be part of an ongoing dialogue between teachers and learners? The answer is **YES!** In this article a definition of intrinsic motivation in general will be put forth. A review of general testing principles will follow. A criteria will be outlined for creating tests which are intrinsically motivating to learners of spoken English as a foreign language. The testing environment will be described as well as the students to whom the tests are given. Finally, three tests administered by the writer will be described.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

A group of students in the film *Dead Poets Society* were governed by complicated rules and had to follow a prescribed standard of behavior. The oppressive nature of the institution caused a teacher and the young men of the school to rebel and "seize the day." They took opportunities to fulfill their own needs rather than submitting to those of the administration. The student soared beyond their own expectations. Perhaps these students

were driven by the avoidance of what Skinner calls "aversive stimuli"- (punishments). However, it could be thought that they were more motivated by their innate drives to explore, to feel secure among a community of human beings, to make their own decisions about what to learn rather than letting it be decided by an administration.

Edward Deci (1975:23) described intrinsic motivation :

Intrinsically motivating activities are ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself . . . Intrinsically motivated behaviors are aimed at bringing about certain rewarding consequences, namely feelings of competence, and self-determination.

How can Deci's definition be applied to the ELF classroom. Consider Brown's checklist below as a litmus test to determine the extent to which teaching techniques adhere to the principle of intrinsic motivation.

INTRINSICALLY MOTIVATING TECHNIQUES : A CHECK LIST

1. Does the technique appeal to the genuine interests of your students? Is it relative to their lives?
2. Is the technique presented in a positive, enthusiastic manner?
3. Are the students clearly aware of the purpose of the technique?
4. Do students have some choice in
 - (a) choosing some aspect of the technique?
 - (b) determining how they go about fulfilling the goals of the technique?
5. Does the technique encourage students to discover for themselves certain principles or rules (rather than simply being "told") ?
6. Does it encourage students in some way to develop or use effective strategies of learning and communication?
7. Does it contribute - at least to some extent - to students' ultimate autonomy and independence (from the

teacher) ?

8. Does it foster cooperative negotiation with other students in the class? Is it a truly interactive technique?
9. Does the technique present a "reasonable challenge"?
10. Do students receive sufficient feedback on their performance (from each other or from you) ?

The answers to this checklist should tell you if what you are doing in the classroom is contributing to your students' intrinsic drives. In short, we need to strive to develop autonomy, not dependence, help learners take charge of their own learning through goal setting, give students a choice in activities, topics and discussions, provide content that is relevant to students, and finally construct tests that adhere to the above principles.

TESTING - AN OVERVIEW

What is a test? Well, everyone knows that a test, in plain, ordinary words, is a way of measuring someone's ability or knowledge in a subject area. It is a method that requires performance on the part of the testee. It has the purpose of measuring. The measurements can be broad, while others can be quantified in rather mathematically exact terms. It measures a given area. There are three requirements of a "good" test: practicality, reliability and validity. A test can be said to be dependable if these three criteria are met.

PRACTICALITY

If a test is easy to administer within the financial and time constraints of the institution, as well as to score and interpret, then it is said to be practical. A test that requires one proctor for each student in a class of 300 is not practical. Neither is a test that takes the student five minutes to complete and the tester 2 hours to assess if there are many students and only a handful of examiners. The quality and value of a test are dependent on such practical considerations.

RELIABILITY

Consistency and dependency are the foundations of a reliable test. Unreliability may crop up in the test itself or in the scoring of the test. If the test is given to two or more subjects on two different occasions, the results should be similar; it should have reliability. If a pilot's test is given, for example, it should be more or less consistent from one day to the next. However, if one test is conducted in heavy winds with thunder and lightning, and another in perfect weather conditions, then test reliability has been sacrificed. I once gave a listening test where a tape was played, but because of construction

noise outside the room, some students could not adequately hear the tape. That was an obvious case of test unreliability.

VALIDITY

As the oral communication courses at the university concentrate on teaching interpersonal, creative, communicative and interactive skills, the tests for those courses should actually have the students perform those skills themselves. That is, the test should have high content validity. A test is said to have content validity if it, according to Brown, "samples the class of situations . . . the universe of subject matter about which conclusions are to be drawn." (1994 : 255) A test that is high in content validity clearly defines the goal that you are measuring, and involves the testee in a sample of the behavior that is being taught in class. A test of skiing competency that asks someone to ride a bicycle lacks content validity. So, if you are trying to test a person's ability to speak conversational English, and assign a paper and pencil multiple choice test, requiring grammatical judgments, you are not achieving content validity.

The tests should also have face validity. Does the test appear to the student, on the face of it, to be testing what was supposedly taught in class? If so, then the test is said to have face validity. If we are to garner the best performance from our students during testing, then face validity must be considered as a component of intrinsically motivating tests.

THE TEACHING AND TESTING ENVIRONMENT

Before continuing on with the specifics of motivation and how it relates to the three language tests described below, a discussion of the educational environment and the students would be helpful. Yamanashi Medical University is a national university located in rural Japan. The General Education Department makes up approximately one-third of the six-year university. The medical students at Yamanashi Medical University are required to study 240 hours of English. Of that number, approximately 60 hours are earmarked for spoken English.

THE STUDENTS

Most of the students are between the ages of 18 and 25 years old. Since most of the students studied English with the purpose of passing the National college entrance exam, they entered the university with a strong foundation in reading, and grammar translation, and a low intermediate or false beginning level of spoken and aural English.

PRINCIPLES OF MOTIVATING TESTS

One of the most difficult challenges of communicative, intrinsically motivating testing has been the construction of practical, reliable and valid oral productions tests. Although the best tests of oral proficiency involve a one-on-one tester/testee relationship, there are other options open to the language teacher desiring variability and the practicality of testing large numbers of students in a small amount of time with limited resources. Here are some steps you can take to create intrinsically motivating tests, outlined in the form of four overriding principles:

1. The principle of giving students advanced preparation

Although simple sounding, often teachers do little to prepare students for tests. Teachers should be an ally in the preparation process by providing information about the format of the test, providing information about the types of items that will appear, giving students opportunities to practice certain item types, offering advice on strategies for test preparation, offering advice on strategies to use during the test itself, and giving anxiety-lowering reassurance.

2. The principle of face validity

Students should know what is being tested when they take a test. This concept was discussed earlier.

3. The principle of authenticity

Authentic and natural language is a good idea, as well as context which creates some kind of thematic organization.

4. The principle of "washback"

"Washback" is the benefit that tests offer to learning. Students should be able to utilize the results that the test feedback offers. Optimally students should get a good idea of their strengths and weaknesses based on the teacher's feedback and prompt return of tests. This is very important to intrinsic motivation.

THE TESTS

I have devised three oral production tests in the attempt to achieve some or all of the principles on effective test construction, while instilling in the students a sense of independence, cooperative group preparation, and involving them in some phase of the evaluation. Such lofty goals are often seen as very unusual to the students at Yamanashi Medical University, who are more used to the traditional type of discrete point, anxiety producing tests. Therefore, I tried to ease the students slowly into becoming accustomed to tests that give them the role of self-evaluator and allow for more independence during the course of these three tests.

The first test is a traditional one-on-one tester (me) testee (student) format. The second is a role play test with two students, with the teacher taking a non-participatory role. The last test is a cooperative pairwork and self evaluation oral test where the students choose items to be tested and evaluate themselves.

TEST 1 STUDENT/TEACHER INTERVIEW

This is usually one of the first tests given. The students are tested on their ability to use the topics practiced in class in private with the teacher. Each student is allotted about three to four minutes to practice in a conversational setting the language topics and functions below with the teacher. The teacher initiates the interview with prompts, and the student answers appropriately, and is scored.

The students find the test particularly motivating because they are evaluated on their speaking ability by a native speaker. Thus it is seen as having face validity. There is no cooperative item construction or peer evaluation on the teacher/student interview. This was done intentionally because students need to be gradually introduced to the notion of taking responsibility for their own learning and evaluation.

SCORE SHEET

STUDENT NAME : _____

SCORE _____ /20

I. WEEKEND

Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

II. JOBS 1

Good 2 Average 1 Poor 0

JOBS 2 Two questions about his job

Question 1 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

Question 2 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

III. FAMILY Three questions about my family

Question 1 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

Question 2 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

Question 3 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

IV. DESCRIBING PEOPLE

Statement 1 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

Statement 2 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

Statement 3 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

Statement 4 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

Statement 5 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

V. DESCRIBING LOCATIONS

Statement 1 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

Question 1 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

VI. DESCRIBING OBJECTS

Statement 1 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

Statement 2 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

Statement 3 Good 1 Average .5 Poor 0

Statement 4	Good 1	Average .5	Poor 0
Statement 5	Good 1	Average .5	Poor 0

TEST TWO - STUDENT/STUDENT ROLEPLAY

This is usually the second test given. It begins to remove the teacher from the speaking test itself and gives the student more control. It also gives the students some choice in the language, as well as the functions, performed in the role play. The students are given a list of the language topics and functions practiced in class, and are told to choose a certain number from among them and write and practice a conversation using the topics/functions chosen. The teacher then scores each student pair. The students also react positively to this test due to the choice and freedom of expression it offers the students. Below is an example of the test and score sheet.

TEST 2 STUDENT/STUDENT ROLE PLAY

With a partner work with the 7 topics below and write one role play conversation between two people. Memorize your conversation, and perform it in front of the class on February 10.

1. Asking and telling about when things open/begin and close/end. Pages 25-27
2. Calling a friend on the telephone. Class notes
3. Asking for and giving directions. Pages 27-32
4. Invitations Pages 41-43
5. Talking about food Pages 57-59
6. Talking about the future Pages 90, 92
7. Visiting the hospital notes

You should

- Speak loud enough for me to hear you clearly
- Your story should fit together naturally and make sense.
- The role-play will be videotaped.
- Your team must speak for 2 – 3 minutes

The score sheet is below

POINTS

I. Delivery (Pronunciation, Fluency, Loud voice, Good speed)	10
II. Speakers talks about 6 things and they fit together	10
III. Grammar/vocabulary	10
TOTAL	30
1. When things open/begin and close.	<u> /3 </u>
2. Calling a friend on the telephone.	<u> /3 </u>
3. Asking for and giving directions.	<u> /3 </u>
4. Invitations	<u> /3 </u>

5. Talking about food	<u> /3 </u>
6. Talking about the future	<u> /3 </u>
Spoke for 2.5 minutes	<u> /7 </u>
Delivery/pronunciation	<u> /5 </u>
Total	<u> /30 </u>

TEST 3 COOPERATIVE PAIRWORK AND SELF EVALUATION

This is one of the last oral communication tests given at the university. It was adapted by a test by Tim Murphey. It gives the students a choice in the test items. It has authentic language and tasks, and it involves the students, not the teacher in every stage of the evaluation. It is the final step in removing the teacher from the learning process, and hopefully launches the students into the world of self study. I feel it brings out the best performance in most of the students. After studying with me for over one year, I feel most of the students are ready for such a student-centered test. Most of the students reacted positively to this examination. However, as the teacher is removed from the evaluation portion of the test, some students didn't feel it was fair, thus lacking validity and reliability. As a result, the scores of the test were not completely reliable. With that in mind, I gave this test in conjunction with a more "traditional" teacher-centered examination. Below is an example of the test.

TEST 3

Name : _____

Part A : Filled out by you _____.

grades: A + A B C F

ENGLISH ONLY ALL THE TIME

1. Based upon what you think you know for the test, what grade would you give yourself now before you take it? _____
2. Based upon how much time and effort you spent studying for the test, what grade would you give yourself now before you take it. _____

Part B : Filled out by your partner _____

Go outside (if it is pretty) and ask your partner the following (the partner who is taller should choose A or B and, then switch):

3. A. What are five non-words you can use to communicate in English, and what do they mean?
Grade/score : _____
3. B. What are five expressions used to avoid silence in English conversation?
Grade/score : _____
4. When both of you have finished#3 above :
Ask your partner to describe some object at home with-

out naming the object so that you know what it is. They should be able to tell you at least five things about it that allow you to know what it is. Count the number of things they tell you. Give them a score of one to five depending on how many things they told you about the object. Then exchange roles.

Grade score : _____

5. The partner with the higher student number should choose one of the following :

1. Congratulations! You have just won a free maid service. You get four hours of maid service for your home. Your partner is your maid. Make five requests (from casual to polite) to your partner about the cleaning service you want for your home.
2. Make five requests for permission from the following situations. Decide if they should be casual or polite.
 - A. You want to hold your friend's baby.
 - B. You are on the phone with the dentist's secretary because you want to change the appointment time.
 - C. You see that your teacher is in his office with the door partly open. You want to go in and talk to him.
 - D. You are at a friend's house and you want a cup of tea
 - E. You want to borrow your roommate's car

The second person speaking must not choose what the first one chose.

Give a grade on 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent)

Grade/score : _____

6. The partner whose student number is lowest must buy a ticket from New York City to the Statue of Liberty. Ask the ticket agent five questions about the trip. Give them a score.

Grade/score : _____

The other partner is going on a vacation to Europe. Ask five questions about traveling in Europe. Give them a score.

Grade/score : _____

Minus points every time you spoke Japanese.

Minus : _____

Total number of points out of 20 possible :

Total score : _____ /20

Now return this paper to the owner.

Part C : Filled out by the same person as in A

After having taken this test, what kind of grade do you think you should get?

Do you think this test gives a fair idea of what you know? Was it easy, fun or what? Would you like to take other tests like this? Was it useful? Could it be improved in some way. Write some impressions below. Thank you very much!

Although brief, a look has been taken at the world of testing in the language classroom of a small Japanese medical university. The theoretical notion of motivation was discussed, as well as how this notion could be applied to the world of oral production tests. Three tests which in some ways adhere to some of the ideals of intrinsic motivation, were shown. I hope it has been clearly shown that tests can have a place in an interactive communicative English course, aiding learning while becoming indispensable components to a curriculum.

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