

VOCABULARY: REVIEWING TRENDS IN EFL/ESL INSTRUCTION AND TESTING

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RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta un resumen de tendencias dentro de la enseñanza y evaluación de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera/ Inglés como Segunda Lengua, centrándose en el papel del léxico en las mismas. Este hecho nos permite proporcionar un esquema explícito, en el que relacionamos las tendencias existentes dentro de la enseñanza de vocabulario como L2 y de evaluación del mismo a lo largo de la historia; lo que beneficiará tanto al profesorado como a los investigadores que hagan referencia a la fundamentación teórica de este campo desde un punto de vista diacrónico al realizar diversas investigaciones.

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of tendencies within EFL/ESL instruction and testing, by focusing on the role assigned to lexis. This issue enables us to provide an explicit scheme relating historical vocabulary approaches to L2 teaching and testing, which will benefit teachers and researchers when aiming to set the theoretical foundations -from a diachronic viewpoint- of different probes within this field.

There is no doubt that second and/or foreign language¹ teaching has evolved, distinguishing different trends throughout its history. Specifically, vocabulary has been the main focus of attention in the last decades, despite being undervalued in previous stages. This issue has been reflected in the reorientation carried out not only in research, but also in assessment. By taking into account its importance in order to reach communication, we consider relevant to review L2 vocabulary teaching and testing, by

¹ We are aware of the distinction between second and foreign language. The former implying the learning of a language different from the mother tongue in the real context within which the language is spoken, i.e. a Spanish speaker learning English in an English-speaking country; and the latter referring to the learning of a language different from the mother tongue in the mother country, i.e. a Spanish speaker learning English in Spain. However, we will use both terms indiscriminately, to refer to any learner learning/acquiring a language different from its native one (We are also conscious of the distinction between acquiring and learning, however, we will not highlight that distinction in our paper).

paying special attention to the position assigned to lexis within the scope of each of the different methods.

Our study differs from previous ones (Zimmerman, 1997; Schmitt, 2000, Manguashca, 1993; Coady, 1995), in several senses. On the one hand, trends in L2 vocabulary teaching are the main focus of attention of different scholars (Manguashca, 1993; Zimmerman, 1997; Coady, 1995), whereas we will make reference to tendencies in both L2 instruction and testing. On the other, despite one of the chapters in Schmitt (2000)'s book entitled *Vocabulary in Language Teaching* is devoted to "History of vocabulary in language learning", and he also provides a historical overview of vocabulary testing; our reviews (his and ours) are divergent in the sense that: (a) He takes into account some approaches to language learning that are not singled out by ours, the same as it also occurs the other way round, we point out some of them, that are not stated by him; (b) As regard to vocabulary testing (see section 2), he just points out the psychometric approach, subsequently we consider that our overview goes more to the point, since we mention a wider amalgam of historical approaches to testing, in order to provide our own summary of this tripartite division, by relating terms already mentioned by different linguists (Madsen, 1983; Weir, 1990; Spolsky, 1995). Moreover, we single out an explicit schema linking both factors (vocabulary approaches to L2 teaching and testing), an element which Schmitt's study lacks.

We believe that our paper is widely justified, since it will fill in a gap within the diachronic reviews of L2 vocabulary teaching and testing theoretical foundations, by providing teachers and researchers a summary of different trends, necessary to set the basis of different probes within this field.

Firstly, we will focus on the role assumed by vocabulary within different teaching methods² and, secondly, we will proceed to describe different approaches to language testing. This order in our presentation is motivated by the following reason, "the direction of the influence is usually from linguistic theory to learning theory to teaching methods and eventually to testing" (Upshur, 1969)³.

1. HISTORICAL CONCEPTION OF THE ROLE OF VOCABULARY WITHIN LANGUAGE TEACHING

In this section, we will just provide a review of the role of vocabulary in different methods of teaching and learning foreign languages –which underlie different theories of learning-.

1.1. The Grammar Translation Method

It was not until the eighteenth century that modern languages started to be studied, and, at the very beginning they were taught in much the same way as the classical ones (Latin, Greek)⁴.

² We will just focus on a selection chosen on a personal basis from the most well known methods.

³ Quoted in Oller (1979:150)

⁴ Foreign and/or second languages have always been studied, even in the most ancient civilizations. Romans were able to learn Greek, thanks to their Greek teacher-slaves who followed the grammar-

We agree with Coady (1995), when pointing out that vocabulary seems to be a central part of the grammar-translation method. However, it should be noted that the vocabulary students were exposed to –taken from literary language samples- was obsolete; being selected according to its ability to illustrate grammatical rules (Rivers, 1981). Students were aimed to be able to read and write classical materials as well as passing standardized exams; they were not really expected to use the target language in real situations, but to profit from the mental exercise. Thus, they were given bilingual vocabulary lists to learn and paradigms to memorize –by favouring rote learning-, which prepared them for translating long passages of the classics.

Subsequently, during the nineteenth century, the teaching of vocabulary was based on definition and etymology; using bilingual word lists as instructional material rather than as reference aids (Zimmerman, 1997).

Due to the neglect of realistic oral language, criticisms to the method started to arise. Nevertheless, despite the objections and challenges (such as Thomas Prendergast's list of the most common English words standing as an objection to the archaic vocabulary lists), the Grammar-Translation Method was still being used till the 1920s, as the primary method for foreign language instruction in Europe and the United States.

1.2. The Reform Movement

The Reform Movement is established by Sweet in the 1880s, as a counter-reaction to the Grammar Translation Method. Consequently, the curriculum developed by Sweet gives phonetics and transcription a more prominent role than vocabulary. Zimmerman (1997) notes that, one of the main innovations –as opposed to the Grammar Translation Method- is the avoidance of studying lists of words out of context. It was only after a thorough study of a complete text that vocabulary items were able to be isolated for instructional purposes. Furthermore, words were associated with the real world, rather than with other words and syntactic patterns. Thus, Sweet (1964:97)⁵ remarks:

“Although language is made up of words, we do not speak in words, but in sentences. From a practical, as well as a scientific, point of view, the sentence is the unit of language, not the word. From a purely phonetic point of view words do not exist.”

Vocabulary was taught at different levels. It is in the *Grammatical Stage* –stage two-, when students begin studying very basic vocabulary; then, in the *Idiomatic Stage*, they pursue vocabulary in greater depth. The following stages (*Literary* and *Archaic*) were based on the study of philology and they were aimed at university-level work (Zimmerman, 1997).

translation method. Further, in the middle ages, Latin, Greek and Hebrew were also taught basing their teaching on it. Thus, it is not surprising that in the eighteenth century, modern languages started to be taught by following the Grammar-Translation Method.

⁵ Quoted in Zimmerman (1997:7)

1.3. The Direct Method

This method was introduced by Berlitz at the end of the nineteenth century. It presupposes that the acquisition of a second language follows the same process as the one carried out when acquiring a first one. Moreover, it emphasizes the demonstration of the items of language through objects and actions. Thus, only everyday vocabulary is taught: on the one hand, concrete vocabulary was explained by demonstration objects and pictures; on the other, abstract vocabulary is taught by association of ideas (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

This method differs greatly from the Grammar Translation Method in the sense that it avoids translation; that is, the Direct Method only uses the target language to clarify the meaning of unknown vocabulary, apart from different explanations through objects and drawings, amongst others.

1.4. The Reading Method / Situational Language Teaching

The Reading Method is born in the United States and Situational Language Teaching in Great Britain in the 1920s and 1930s respectively, in order to develop the reading skills of learners of foreign languages.

For the first time, vocabulary was considered to be one of the most important aspects of second language learning, prioritizing a rational basis for selecting the vocabulary content of language courses (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

In Great Britain, it is Michael West who stresses the primary role of vocabulary in learning a foreign language. Thus, West (1930:514)⁶ remarks:

“The Primary thing in learning a language is the acquisition of a vocabulary, and practice in using it (which is the same thing as ‘acquiring’). The problem is what vocabulary; and none of these ‘modern textbooks in common use in English schools’ have attempted to solve the problem.”

West advises to use word-frequency lists⁷, recommending the use of Thorndike’s one. In 1953, West published *A General Service List of English Words*⁸. Even though, this list is old, Zimmerman (1997) notes that it is still considered to be the most widely used of high-frequency word lists. We do agree with Zimmerman in this point, since there are computer programs such as VocabProfile (Laufer & Nation, 1999) that make reference to it in order to carry out the assessment of embedded productive vocabulary, by listing words according to different frequencies stated in this list. Besides, this list is also present in Laufer & Nation (1995) *Vocabulary Levels Test*, to which we will refer in subsequent sections.

⁶ Quoted in Zimmerman (1997:9)

⁷ A *word-frequency* list is a one which includes the most common words in a language, being in this case, English.

⁸ This list includes about two thousand of the most useful words in English, as well as it provides useful information about the relative frequency of their various meaning senses (Schmitt 2000). West’s list can also be retrieved from Internet from <http://plaza3.mbn.or.jp/~bauman/gsl.html>

As Wesche & Paribakht (1996) note, the use of word frequency lists in testing vocabulary is due to the fact that the more frequently a word is, the more likely it is to be known by language users. Similarly, Nation (1990) notes that by taking into account word-frequency lists, teachers can infer different implications for teaching, learning, and subsequently assessing, since they are able to develop a feeling about which words should be given attention to. However, Nation also considers that frequency counts may pose a number of problems, amongst others he highlights the following ones: (a) Some useful and important words do not occur in between the first of second 1,000 words; (b) there are words included in the 1,000-word band that are not suitable for a beginners' vocabulary; (c) there is sometimes a disagreement in the different word lists, that is a high-frequent word in one list, may be considered to be low frequent in another, amongst others.

1.5. The Audio-Lingual Method

The Audio Lingual Method appeared in the 1940s, being Skinner's behaviourism the theory lying behind. Consequently, language learning is understood as a process of habit formation acquired by rewarding right responses (stimuli – response).

Since the main aim of this method was enabling students to master particular structures in order to utter structurally correct sentences, just enough simple and familiar words were introduced, so that students would not be distracted from concentration on the target structures. Therefore, vocabulary was seen as a set of items which should fill in the slots found in the different sentence frames. Moreover, as Coady (1995) states, it was taken for granted that good language habits and exposure to the language itself, would eventually lead to vocabulary increase.

During this period, it was suggested that learning too much vocabulary early in the language learning process gives students a false sense of security. However, scholars such as Twaddell show their concern on the downgrading of vocabulary which leads to an overstressing of the role of grammar, and as Zimmerman (1997:12) states:

Freeman Twaddell, a colleague of Fries, echoed Fries's concern that language learners often overvalue word knowledge and equate it with knowledge of the language; he suggested that teachers and theoreticians have reacted against learners' exaggeration of the role of vocabulary by downgrading it and have consequently overemphasized the role of grammar.

1.6. Communicative language teaching

Within communicative approaches⁹, we can observe a change in the focus of language teaching from the command of structures to communicative proficiency.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that, vocabulary has not been the focus of explicit attention in communicative language research or methodology. They considered the

⁹ Different methods are included within the notion of communicative language teaching, sharing the goal of promoting fluency over accuracy.

acquisition of a second language as a phenomenon analogous to first language acquisition; therefore, they assumed that L2 vocabulary would take care of itself in L2 acquisition, the same as vocabulary development in L1 (Coady, 1995). Thus, as Zimmerman (1997) notes, their attention has been turned more toward the appropriate use of communicative categories (Van Ek, 1976; Wilkins, 1972), and towards language as discourse (Widdowson, 1979), as a way to overcome the weaknesses of the structural syllabus, such as its tendency to highlight grammatical features of language, over the functional and pragmatic communication between and among human beings, which is the ultimate purpose of language (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

In the argument for fluency over accuracy, we agree with Widdowson (1978) when he claims that native speakers can better understand ungrammatical utterances with accurate vocabulary than those with accurate grammar and inaccurate vocabulary. For example, if a foreign learner says an ungrammatically correct sentence such as: 'I'm thirsty. * Do you can give me a glass of water, please?' (...) 'Yes, of course'; we will be able to understand this utterance and help his/her request. On the other hand, if a foreign language learner says a grammatically correct sentence but using a wrong lexical item such as *salt* instead of *water*, interaction between both speakers will not really take place. E.g. 'I'm thirsty. Can you give me a glass of salt, please?' (...) 'Sorry?'

1.7. The Natural Approach

According to Coady (1995), the natural approach is somehow an outgrowth of communicative approaches. Vocabulary is considered as relevant to the language acquisition process, since comprehensible and meaningful input is emphasized over grammatically correct production. In the same vein, Krashen & Terrel (1983:155) point out:

"Acquisition depends crucially on the input being comprehensible. And comprehensibility is dependent directly on the ability to recognize the meaning of key elements in the utterance. Thus, acquisition will not take place without comprehension of vocabulary".

As Zimmerman (1997) notes, Krashen (1993) suggests reading as an effective means by which students beyond the beginning levels can acquire new vocabulary, that is, he proposes that there is actually no need for direct vocabulary instruction since students will learn vocabulary from context by reading extensively, as long as there is successful comprehension.

Summing up, we can say that vocabulary is taken into account by the Natural Approach as long as it is one necessary element in order to carry out successful communication. Moreover, L2 vocabulary acquisition is considered to be achieved effortless, in a similar way to the L1 language acquisition process.

1.8. Current and future perspectives on lexical issues

According to Zimmerman (1997), in the 1980s there has been a reorientation in language description which has led many to rethink the nature of language and the role played by vocabulary.

This scholar highlights different works –amongst others- that represent a theoretical and pedagogical shift from the past. Thus, work on corpus analysis such as The Collins Birmingham University International Language Database (COBUILD) Project, has been designed to account for actual language use, by reviving an interest for accurate language description. There are other studies that have gone beyond the traditional view of word boundaries; consequently the importance of a lexico-grammatical unit such as the ‘lexical phrase’¹⁰ has been put forward (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1997); as well as, the state of language as consisting of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar (Lewis, 1994)¹¹.

Furthermore, amongst the different investigations that present analysis of rather contemporary techniques in learning and/or teaching L2 vocabulary, we would like to highlight the following ones:

Oxford & Crookall (1990) evaluate different vocabulary teaching techniques, which are divided into four broad categories according to its contextualizing: decontextualizing, which present the word isolated from any context such as word lists, flashcards and dictionary use; semicontextualizing, which permit some degree of context, for instance word association, keyword, visual and aural imagery; fully contextualizing, which involves speaking and writing practice within a context, and adaptable that can supplement other techniques.

Hunt & Beglar (1998) present three approaches to vocabulary instruction: incidental learning of vocabulary through reading and/or listening; explicit instruction and independent strategy development, which implies guessing from context.

Finally, we would like to summarize how vocabulary has been viewed and presented through the history of second language teaching in figure 1¹².

¹⁰ Nattinger & DeCarrico (1997:1) define lexical phrases “as ‘chunks’ of language of varying length, phrases like *as it were*, *on the other hand*, *as X would have us believe*, and so on. As such, they are multi-word lexical phenomena that exist somewhere between the traditional poles of lexicon and syntax, conventionalized form/function composites that occur more frequently and have more idiomatically determined meaning than language that is put together each time”.

¹¹ According to Lewis (1994), the grammar/vocabulary dichotomy is invalid since much language is composed of multi-word ‘chunks’. Writing is acknowledged as a secondary element, being the primary one speech; within which successful language is a wider concept than accurate language. Grammatical error is considered as intrinsic to the learning process and collocation is put forward as an organising principle within syllabuses.

¹² It should be noted that most bibliographical references have not been included in this table, since the references can be found all along this section.

PERIOD OF TIME ¹³	TEACHING METHOD	VOCABULARY ROLE
From 18 th c. to 1920s	Grammar Translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary is central. • Obsolete vocabulary taken from literary samples and selected according to its ability to illustrate grammatical rules. • Use of bilingual vocabulary lists as instructional materials.
From 1880s	Reform Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonetics and transcription are given a more prominent role than vocabulary. • Simple and useful words are taught at different levels. • Words are learnt within a context and isolated word lists are not provided, but when a thorough study of them within a context has been undertaken.
End 19 th c.	Direct Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyday vocabulary taught with no translation. • Concrete, simple and familiar vocabulary was explained with demonstration objects and pictures. • Abstract vocabulary was taught through association of ideas.
1920s 1930s	Reading Method/ Situational Language Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary considered to be one of the most important aspects of language learning. • Advice to use word-frequency lists.
1940s	Audio Lingual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple and familiar vocabulary taught to avoid students' distraction from target structures. • Vocabulary is seen as a set of items which should fill in the slots of the different sentence frames in order to make the drills possible. • Good language habits and exposure to the language itself, will lead to vocabulary increase. • Vocabulary role is downgraded and consequently the role of grammar is overemphasized.
1970s	Communicative Language Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary is not a primary concern. It was assumed that L2 vocabulary will take care of itself in the process of L2 acquisition. • Main focus: appropriate use of language varieties (i.e. notions and functions) and emphasis on language as discourse.
1980s	The Natural Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary is relevant, since it is an important element to achieve communication. • L2 Vocabulary can be acquired effortless, in the same way as L1 vocabulary acquisition process. • No need for direct vocabulary instruction, since students will learn vocabulary from context by reading extensively.
From 1980s onwards	Current and Future Perspectives on Lexical Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New directions in language description, have led to a rethinking of the role played by vocabulary. <p>Challenges to the traditional view of word boundaries (Nattinger & DeCarrico 1997, Lewis 1994).</p>

Figure 1. Review of the role of vocabulary within language teaching.

By having a look at figure 1, we can observe that the teaching and learning of vocabulary has been undervalued in the field of L2 teaching through its different stages up to the present day, as linguists such as Meara (1980) and Carter (1987) had already noted;

¹³ Even though, we have labelled this section as "Period of time", it should be noted that, we have just sought to provide the main starting point of each trend, and not the range of years that are subsumed within each one.

being emphasized other aspects of language learning far more than they do vocabulary with the possible exceptions of newer approaches, such as the ones put forward in Nattinger & DeCarrico (1997) and in Lewis (1994) (Zimmerman, 1997; Coady, 1995).

We do agree with Zimmerman (1997) and Coady (1995), since it is true that before the 1940s, vocabulary had been emphasized in language classroom, even though in the form of bilingual vocabulary lists -which included obsolete vocabulary taken from literary texts- and this exaggeration of the role of vocabulary gave way to its downgrading. We hope, the same as Zimmerman (1997:17) does, that “the central role occupied by vocabulary in the reality of language learning will one day be reflected in the attention given to it in research and the classroom”.

2. REVIEW OF LANGUAGE TESTING APPROACHES

Our purpose in this section is to build a better understanding of the past of language testing history, in order to position a better understanding of the current approaches to it.

Broadly speaking, three main trends can be distinguished within the history of language test development. However, their nomenclature and even their underlying meaning differs according to different scholars –as it will be explained-. On the one hand, its evolution is said to range from the intuitive era, to the scientific era, reaching to the communicative era of testing (Madsen, 1983); on the other, the different trends within the history of language testing are labelled as the psychometric-structuralist era, the psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic era, and the communicative approach to language testing (Weir, 1990). A further analysis of language testing history as moving from the traditional or pre-scientific phase to the psychometric-structuralist (or scientific) period and being followed by the psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic stage is also proposed (Spolsky, 1995) (see figure 2). However, from our viewpoint, these three different tripartite divisions of language testing history do not account for the same underlying ideas, therefore we will proceed to clarify them.

Madsen (1983)	Weir (1990)	Spolsky (1995) ¹⁴
Intuitive era		Traditional or pre-scientific phase
Scientific era	Psychometric-structuralist era	Psychometric-structuralist period
	Psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic era	Psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic stage
Communicative era	Communicative era	

Figure 2. Trends in history language test development (according to Madsen, 1983; Weir, 1990; Spolsky, 1995).

¹⁴ Spolsky (1995) reviews this nomenclature in subsequent papers, and he refers to them as the traditional period, the modern and the post-modern. However, some years ago Spolsky (1995: 354) offered an

2.1. The intuitive era of testing

The intuitive era of testing is related to subjective testing, which depends on the personal impressions of teachers, carried out during the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. During that period, teachers who lacked testing instruction, evaluated students in a variety of ways such as by translation and dictation, amongst others (Madsen, 1983). This period corresponds to what Spolsky (1995) labels the traditional or pre-scientific phase.

2.2. The scientific era

Following the intuitive era of testing, we come across the scientific era. One of the great changes is that teachers untrained in testing no longer carry out the evaluation procedures, but testing specialists, which started to evaluate tests statistically, measuring its reliability and validity. Therefore, subjective tests began to be replaced by objective tests (Madsen, 1983).

In our opinion, an amalgam of Madsen (1983) Weir (1990) and Spolsky (1995)'s terminological distinctions can be made. Thus, we consider that Madsen (1983)'s scientific era of testing can be further divided into a twofold subgroup, which would include Weir (1990) and Spolsky (1995)'s differentiation between the psychometric-structuralist era and the psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic era.

The psychometric-structuralist era

The psychometric-structuralist era is related to the use of 'discrete' item tests¹⁵, that is, tests which focus on discrete linguistic terms, without paying attention to the way those elements interact in a larger context of communication. One of the key scholars favouring this approach to language testing over others is Robert Lado (1961). It should also be noted that Spolsky is also a relevant scholar within this era of language testing.

This approach to language testing offers some clear advantages, as well as some other disadvantages. For example, since they focus on discrete linguistic items that are easily quantifiable, they are considered to be objectively scored tests. However, different linguists criticise discrete point tests in the sense that their results are artificial, since they have nothing to do with the use of language in real life situations. Furthermore, crucial properties of language are lost due to the fact of testing apart discrete elements of language; it should be taken into account that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Oller, 1979). Moreover, grammatical competence is not a good predictor of communicative skills (Savignon, 1972; Clapen, 1970)¹⁶.

alternative conjecture "which sees the development of language testing not as three periods but rather as an unresolved (and fundamentally unresolvable) tension between competing sets of forces."

¹⁵ Discrete approach to language testing is also called analytical approach to language testing, as opposed to the integrative approach which stands for the psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic era. However, some scholars do not consider that both approaches stand as clear distant entities, but there is a continuum from the most discrete-point item to the most integrative end of the continuum (Cohen, 1980).

¹⁶ Quoted in Weir (1990)

The psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic era

The psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic era stands for an integrative approach to language testing, whose main aim is to be able to carry out functionally and socially contextualized testing of language use (Spolsky, 1995).

Oller (1979) is one of the linguists that favoured global integrative tests, by claiming that those tests – for instance, cloze and dictation- could measure language ability in a more closely approximation to the actual process of language use; as a reaction to the atomistic assumptions of discrete point tests. Oller (1979) maintained that provided those linguistic tests required ‘performance’ under real life constraints, they were a potential for communication, even if they did not test communication itself.

Even though, tests such as cloze and dictation are global, that is, they require examinees to show control over different aspects of the language system, they are indirect (Weir 1990); and just direct tests which simulate real communication tasks can claim to mirror actual communicative interaction.

As Weir (1990) remarks, Rea (1978) has emphasized that even though indirect measures of language abilities claim extremely high standards of reliability and validity as established by statistical techniques, other types of validity remain suspect. For example, cloze results are affected by altering the point where the deletions start from. Furthermore, cloze and dictation test competence rather than performance –as opposed to what Oller (1979) claims-, therefore they depend basically on the learner’s knowledge of the language system rather than in the ability to deal with the language system in coping with day-to-day communicative tasks; being essentially usage-based, and not offering the opportunity for spontaneous production (Carroll, 1980).

2.3. The communicative era of language testing

The communicative era of language testing is underpinned by the communicative theory of language learning. When dealing with communicative language testing, Carroll (1980) should be mentioned, due to her contribution to the field. She points out that Widdowson (1978)’s distinction between ‘usage’ and ‘use’ is of great importance for teaching and testing. On the one hand, we may come across tests which are related to ‘usage’, whose primary goal is to test formal language patterns; and on the other, they may be concentrated on ‘use’, that is on testing how the language is used, by taking into account the communicative function. According to Carroll: “The criterion for success lies not in formal correctness but in the communicative effectiveness”(p. 8), since language is essentially a tool for communication. Thus, the objective is to learn the ‘use’ of a language, being the ‘usage’ –or mastery of the formal patterns- a means to achieve this objective.

As Carroll notes, changing the emphasis from ‘usage’ to ‘use’ means also changing ideas concerning the specificity of tests, since from the ‘usage’ point of view, a language can be seen as a unified entity with fixed grammatical patterns and a core of commonly-used lexical items. Whereas, from the ‘use’ point of view, language loses its appearance of unity and must be taught and tested according to the specific needs of the learners. The only problem in communicative language testing seems to lie in the fact that, the adoption

of the criteria of communicative use presents many difficulties to the tester. Therefore, first it should be discovered how to carry out a rigorous measurement of language-based performance¹⁷ and yet keep intact the essential features of communicative behaviour, since when building up objectively-scored tests of linguistic items, we may miss the essence of the measurement of communicative performance.

Likewise, there are some distinguishing features communicative language tests should have such as the performance tasks should be related to possible tasks that learners may encounter in real life situations; tests should be reliable¹⁸ and as direct as possible; furthermore, the criteria employed in the assessment of these tasks, is no longer based on linguistic accuracy, but on the ability to communicate effectively in particular situations.

Moreover, in the last decades, a wide range of manual and/or technological vocabulary tests have been developed. Thus, amongst others, we come across:

- (a) Discrete vocabulary tests which assess receptive and/or productive vocabulary, such as *Vocabulary Levels Test* (Nation, 1983, Laufer & Nation, 1999, Schmitt *et al.*, 2001), *Eurocentres Vocabulary Size Test* (Meara & Jones, 1987), *Vocabulary Knowledge Scale* (Wesche & Paribakht, 1996), *Word Associations Format* (Read, 1993), *Lex30* (Meara & Fitzpatrick, 2000).
- (b) Embedded vocabulary tests which measure vocabulary, forming part of the assessment of some other larger construct, such as written compositions. Amongst others, we would like to highlight the following assessing instruments: *English Composition Profile* (Jacobs *et al.*, 1981), *Lexical Frequency Profile* (Laufer & Nation, 1995) and *WordSmith Tools* (Scott 1997).

Finally, we would like to put forward the close relationship between second language testing trends and vocabulary instruction. Thus, after reviewing different notions of a three-stage history of language testing, we have attempted to sum up the different approaches into a tripartite division of the history of language testing as it can be seen in figure 3. Consequently, the intuitive era of testing seems to have been underpinned by the grammar-translation method; the scientific era would include not only the psychometric-structuralist era (being rooted in the audio-lingual teaching method) but also the psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic era (which is supported by Wilkins' notional-functional syllabuses); and the communicative era of language testing which is grounded on the principles of the communicative approach¹⁹.

¹⁷ Using the term performance is right as long as, it refers to an individual's performance of an isolated situation, but as soon as we wish to generalize about ability to handle other situation, not only performance, but also competence are involved. In consequence, it should make clear that communicative language testing involves competence and performance; however, it is only performance which can be directly observed and assessed; since there is no possible way to assess competence but through its realization in performance (Weir 1990).

¹⁸ There seems to be a concern among language testers about the problems of format effect, which is related to the possibility that test results may differ depending on the test format employed.

¹⁹ As it was previously pointed out, the communicative approach includes teaching methods that promote fluency over accuracy.

TESTING		TEACHING METHOD
<p>INTUITIVE ERA (Madsen, 1983) / TRADITIONAL OR PRE-SCIENTIFIC PHASE (Spolsky, 1995)</p> <p><u>Key features:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Untrained teachers in testing. • Subjective testing. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GRAMMAR- TRANSLATION METHOD - Obsolete vocabulary-taken from literary samples-is central. - Vocabulary selected to illustrate grammatical rules. - Bilingual vocabulary lists are used as instructional materials rather than as reference aids.
<p>SCIENTIFIC ERA (Madsen, 1983)</p> <p><u>Key features:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing specialists • Objective tests. 	<p>PSYCHOMETRIC-STRUCTURALIST ERA (Weir, 1990; Spolsky, 1995)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrete-point testing • Main test format: Multiple-choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AUDIO – LINGUAL METHOD - Vocabulary seen as a set of items which should fill in the slots of the different sentence frames in order to make the drills possible. - Simple and familiar vocabulary taught to avoid distraction from target structures. - Exposure to the language itself, will lead to vocabulary increase. - Vocabulary role downgraded and consequently the role of grammar is overemphasized.
	<p>PSYCHOLINGUISTIC-SOCIOLINGUISTIC ERA (Weir, 1990; Spolsky, 1995)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrative testing • Main test format: Cloze 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (Wilkins, 1972) - Vocabulary not a primary concern. - Assumed that L2 vocabulary will take care of itself in the process of L2 acquisition.
<p>COMMUNICATIVE ERA (Madsen, 1983; Weir, 1990)</p> <p><u>Key features:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tests focus on ‘use’ rather than on ‘usage’ • Reliable tests. • Realistic tasks. • Test format taken into account. Not a single best test format. • Tests should have a strong washback effect on practice in the language classroom. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COMMUNICATIVE APPROACHES - Vocabulary is relevant, since it is an important element to achieve communication. - No need for direct vocabulary instruction, L2 vocabulary can be acquired effortlessly –by reading extensively-.

Figure 3. Review of second language testing trends and methodological approaches.

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