

Conclusion

Skutnabb-Kangas(1981) refers to three different stages in the development of language testing as described by Spolsky (1976), namely:

- the pre-scientific
- the psychometric-structuralist
- the psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic

The first was characterized by an over-reliance on intuitive procedures to determine what the crucial components were in measuring linguistic skills, but without being grounded in any theory regarding proficiency or use.

The aim of the second stage was to ensure greater technical and statistical precision in testing, but this did not account for the sociolinguistic aspects of the contexts and the purposes for which either or both languages are used.

The third stage has tried to address this sociolinguistic aspect by attempting to assess language competence in 'real' situations, only to find that, in attempts to redress previous shortcomings, the balance may have tipped too much in that direction. Skutnabb-Kangas (1981:220) describes this as an "eagerness to test what people actually *do* with their languages (instead of or in addition to testing what they *could* do...", stating that "the danger with this more sociolinguistically-orientated kind of testing is that we forget that language is also for purposes other than everyday communication..."

The gamut of linguistic, sociolinguistic, socio-cultural and methodological complexity involved in ensuring the reliability of language testing has, consequently, caused some to question the process on grounds of validity.

Perhaps the following quote from Skehan (1988) summarises the fundamental issue:

Genuine communication is inter-action based, with more than one participant; unpredictable and creative, i.e. genuine communication may take the participants in unforeseen directions; is situated in a context which is both linguistic / discoursal and also sociocultural; has a purpose, in that participants will be trying to achieve something by use of language, e.g. to persuade, to deceive, etc.; uses authentic stimulus materials and avoids contrived, specially produced materials; is based on real psychological conditions, such as time pressure; and is outcome evaluated, in that successful performance is judged in terms of whether communicative purposes have been achieved. (Skehan, 1988: 215).

This module has attempted to introduce the student to some key issues in relation to bilingualism *in the individual* but has also indicated clearly on occasions how these connect with wider aspects to be studied in later modules. Totally compartmentalising and isolating such issues, therefore, would not only have proved to be impossible but also disadvantageous, since an awareness of the *interaction of variables* surrounding each issue is a crucial factor in enhancing and deepening our understanding of each in turn.

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