Chapter 8

Towards the Implementation of E–Assessment in L2 IsiZulu:
An Examination of Four Listening Comprehension Tests

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on a quantitative study that investigated the adoption and implementation of e-assessments of listening comprehension tasks on second language learners registered for the Basic isiZulu module at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Specifically, the chapter examines the process used in the design of listening comprehension activities. It focuses on the pedagogical implications of adopting such tasks within the assessment rigour. Drawing on Hemmati and Ghaderi's study, the focus is on the format of questions. The experiment was conducted over four weeks with a cohort of non-mother-tongue learners of isiZulu. Encouragingly, the findings of the experiment suggest that formative e-assessments of listening comprehension tasks are beneficial to students. Language teachers should, however, engage in a careful and thoughtful planning process in the design of relevant and authentic listening comprehension tasks.

INTRODUCTION

Computer-based assessments or electronic assessments (e-assessments) in the learning and teaching of a second language (L2) are rapidly changing the way language teachers assess in tertiary education. The plethora of online assessment tools and software available for language teachers to use has reshaped the

way languages are taught, learned and assessed. However, an important consideration is that technology is not about "whether we use technology, but how we use it" (Mercado, 2017, p. 2), which means that technology should be for a purpose to benefit both learners and teachers. Technology offers learners new ways "to learn, practice and strategize", and teachers can "make the instructional process more diverse, effective, efficient, engaging and contextually meaningful" (Mercado, 2017, p. 2). Technology affords multi-modal opportunities, that is, aural, written and with visual prospects for learners and language teachers to execute work within complex tasks (Ellis, 2018, p. 17). For instance, Moodle is the selected open-source learning management system (LMS), available to all academics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), South Africa. In 2016, Moodle was launched as the official LMS at UKZN and as the mandatory phase-in across all disciplines (UKZN, 2015). Academics were provided with rudimentary Moodle training to use software to complement the teaching and learning process. Training consisted of navigating through the platform, uploading lecture material and notes and posting messages. Features such as discussion forums, chats and assessment tools were excluded from the training. Thus, the norm was posting messages related to the discipline, and uploading lecture notes. However, very little Moodle intervention occurred in teaching, learning and assessment.

As with many global tertiary institutions, South African institutions are faced with large student enrolments (Snowball, 2014). Consequently, teaching workloads have escalated, particularly the assessment of large cohorts of students. At UKZN, English is used as the language of instruction. However, the university is located in a province where the majority are L1 speakers of isiZulu. Hence, the implementation of UKZN's compulsory language rule for non-mother-tongue speakers of isiZulu (UKZN, 2014). This has resulted in a significant increase in student enrolment within the Basic IsiZulu module. Traditional pen-and paper-based assessments became challenging and impractical, and it was apparent that an alternative mode of assessment was required. Assessing in an electronic environment was not implemented in the teaching and learning of African languages in South Africa. Academics who teach in the Basic isiZulu module have experimented using the Quiz tool available in Moodle as part of the assessment rigor. The rationale for adopting and implementing the Quiz tool as formative assessments is to integrate technology in the teaching and learning of isiZulu and to create an opportunity for digital generation students to interact with online assessments innovatively. Formative assessments are implemented for developmental purposes, thereby providing students with the opportunity to review and improve their performance.

Additionally, the software tool provides academics with an alternate method of assessing large cohorts of students and reducing time spent on administrative aspects during the assessment. Although there are many benefits to computer-based assessments, the researchers are specifically concerned with the implications of integrating such assessments into the Basic isiZulu module. In particular, the researchers are concerned with synchronizing established L2 acquisition methodological principles with a computer-assisted language learning (CALL) tool such as Moodle. This chapter thus explores an unchartered area of research within the field of teaching and learning L2 isiZulu. Given the lack of empirical research relating to the design and implementation of online assessments for teaching isiZulu as L2, this chapter contributes to the existing literature on e-assessments and focuses particularly on exploring listening comprehension tests in an L2 isiZulu e-assessment. The general objective of this chapter is to highlight the adoption and integration of e-assessments in a Basic isiZulu module. Based on action research methodology and through an iterative process over a semester, the online listening comprehension tests were tailored and included in the assessment format. However, the specific objective of this chapter is to present an analysis of four formative online listening comprehension tests. Being aware that listening

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