Chapter Three

Communicative Language Testing and its Theoretical Backdrop

3.1 Introduction:

The present chapter deals with the theoretical framework, principles, and characteristics of Communicative language testing. It also suggests the mechanics of test construction as per communicative parameters, along with the techniques for basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing.

3.2 Background to Communicative Approach:

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) came into existence in the wake of certain changes in the British language teaching tradition from the late 1960s. It is the product of the shift in language teaching due to the impact of the Communicative theory and the Cognitive theory of language learning. These influences shifted the emphasis from the mastery of language structure to language use, from perceiving language as ‘a set of rules’ to as ‘a means of communication’, from ‘linguistic competence’ to ‘communicative competence’, and from ‘Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis’ to ‘Inter-language Hypothesis’.
Till then Situational language teaching, informed by audio-lingual theory, was the widely accepted approach used for the teaching of English as a foreign language. The task of syllabus designer, here, seemed to be ‘selecting structural items and grading them in suitable order for teaching’ (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979:01). Brumfit (1979:183) states “…the strategy works like this: we present a structure, drill it, practice it in context … then move to the next structure”. Wilkins (1976:03) claims that “in this way we gradually ‘synthetically’ build up the inventory of structural items our students can handle”.

Success or failure in language learning, as interpreted both through examination results and through student or teacher judgment, has generally come to be assessed in terms of ability to manipulate the structures of the language (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979:01).

Over a period of time, it was realized by linguists that such syllabi were mainly dominated by the teaching of language ‘forms’. The aspects of ‘meaning’, ‘notions’ and ‘functions’ were available at the periphery, but their presence was not as per the perception of the Communicative theory.

This happened because

The proclaimed characteristic feature of Bloomfieldian and neo-Bloomfieldian American Structuralism was its careful concern to
restrict itself to the study of form, and the classifications of the forms of a language, without reference to the categories of meaning. Linguistics was almost exclusively, the study of language structure. Then, in the late fifties, Chomsky published his *Syntactic Structures* and this event heralded the arrival of Transformational-Generative Grammar. The transformational theory of grammar does indeed represent a revolution in the aims of linguistic study... Yet Transformational Grammar shares one fundamental characteristic with Structural linguistics: it is the importance given to the study of language structure... Linguistics – in Chomsky as in Bloomfield – is by and large the study of language structure. (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979:2-3).

3.2.1. Since the mid 1970s, the scope of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has broadened significantly. Both British and American proponents of this approach consider it as an approach which aims at making ‘communicative competence’ the goal of language teaching and developing certain procedures for such teaching that pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language. Communicative approach proposes to consider the communicative value of every thing which is taught. Items are not just taught because they are there, but each item in the syllabus is justified on the basis of the communicative needs of the learners (Wilkins 1979).

The linguists, under the influence of structuralism, were mainly found formulating rules that could describe grammatical sentences. ‘Competence’ was given primacy and was perceived as native speakers’ linguistic code.
This is well explained by Widdowson (1979:117-118), when he describes this approach as:

…one which combines situational presentation with structural practice. Language items are presented in situations in the classroom to ensure that their meaning is clear, and then practiced as formal structures by means of exercises of sufficient variety to sustain the interest of the learner and in sufficient numbers to establish the structures in the learners’ memory. The principal aim is to promote knowledge of the language system, to develop the learners’ competence (to use Chomsky’s terms) by means of controlled performance. The assumption behind this approach seems to be that learning a language is a matter of associating the formal elements of the language system with their physical realization … Essentially, what is taught by this approach is the ability to compose correct sentences.

Opposed to this view of language teaching, there emerged the Communicative Approach, which is explained by Brumfit & Johnson (1979:03) in the following words:

It is a reaction against the view of language as a set of structures, it is a reaction towards a view of language as communication, a view in which meaning and the uses to which language is put to play a central part. In language teaching, this reaction is crystallizing itself into the ‘communicative approach’ …

A powerful discontent against structuralist view, in the name of communicative approach, was mainly propounded by Hymes (in Brumfit & Johnson, 1979) in his essay “On Communicative Competence” and by Halliday in his essay “Towards a Sociological Semantics” (extracts in Brumfit & Johnson, 1979), by Allen and Widdowson in their essay “Teaching the communicative use of English” (in Brumfit & Johnson, 1979), and by

It is under the influence of these remarkable studies and due to the emergence of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and discourse studies that, linguists are able to recognize the other internalized rules of the native speakers that were considered significant in determining language behavior. ‘Meaning’ and ‘language use’ were started to be looked with a new perspective, where linguists were able to identify new dimensions. Such aspects as ‘extra linguistic constrains’, the sociolinguistic considerations of ‘appropriateness’, the communicative context, etc. came forward to explain that “meaning does not exist ready-made in the linguistic code, but is rather a function of the relationships between language forms, functions and context, including the intentions of the speaker and the expectations of the hearer” (Wesche, 1983:42). Wesche (1983:42) further states:

…in this perspective language competence is viewed as complex system of rule sets which operate simultaneously at many levels to determine the organization of grammatical forms for the fulfillment of communicative and other language functions. Language competence is not “additive”, or the sum of discrete sets of syntactic, phonological, morphological, semantic, and discourse level items and organizational systems.

3.2.2 Van Patten (1998:925) discusses the perceptions and perspectives of the term communicative and goes to the extent to claim that “the term
‘communicative’ has come to be commonplace in second language teaching. Whether one is engaged in theory and research, language instruction, textbook development and publishing, or technological innovations, it is understood, if not explicitly stated, that contemporary language teaching means communicative language teaching”. Van Patten (1998:925-932) identifies the following three views of the term ‘communicative’ as perceived with regard to textbooks:

i. ‘Communicative’ refers to speaking. That is to say a lay man’s definition of communication and communicative might be restricted to oral use of language. This perception proves to be correct with regard to the development and promotion of ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.

ii. Communicative refers to an end point, a goal, where a standard lesson in a textbook follows the sequence: Presentation → Practice → Communication. This sequence resembles Rivers’ (1964) concept of “from skill-getting to skill-using”.

iii. The term ‘communicative’ permeates language teaching, that is, the application of learned material.

Savignon (1997), in the introductory chapter to the second edition of her book *Communicative Competence: Theory and Classroom Practice*, develops a series of definitions for communication and communicative competence. She says: “Communication … is a continuous process of expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning” (8). Later, she adds by saying that “Communicative competence applies to both written and spoken language, as well as to many other symbolic systems” (8).
Even Nunan (1989), in his book *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*, claims that communicative activity is not limited to one modality (i.e., skill) and most certainly cannot be equated with speaking.

Based on such studies as Savignon (1997) and Nunan (1989), VanPatten (1998) presents the following three perspectives about ‘communicative as viewed by scholars and researchers:

i. ‘Communicative’ refers to all modes of language use and is not restricted to speaking or so-called productive abilities. A communicative activity, then, is any activity in which the conveyance of meaning is primary, where there are both message expresser and message interpreters who are responsible for communication.

ii. ‘Communicative’ refers to language acquisition. In other words, language acquisition occurs due to communicative events.

iii. ‘Communicative’ refers to purposeful language use. People engage in communication for one of two basic purposes: socio-psychological or cognitive-informational (Lee and VanPatten 1995, in VanPatten, 1998:928).

The expectations of the communicative view of language use are best expressed by Widdowson (1979:118) in the following words:

> The difficulty is that the ability to compose sentences is not the only ability we need to communicate. Communication only takes place when we make use of sentences to perform a variety of different acts of an essentially social nature. Thus we do not communicate by composing sentences, but by using sentences to make statements of different kinds to describe, to record, to classify, and so on, or to ask questions, make requests, give orders. Knowing what is involved in putting sentences together correctly is only one part of what we mean by knowing a language, and it has very little value on its own; it has to
be supplemented by a knowledge of what sentences count as in their normal use as a means of communicating.

Premised on these views, Widdowson (1979:119) goes on to suggest:

What I should like to suggest is that we should consider ways of adapting the present approach to the teaching of English so as to incorporate the systematic teaching of communicative value. I would propose that in the process of limitation, gradation, and presentation, we should think not only in terms of linguistic structures and situational settings, but also in terms of communicative acts.

3.2.3 Another impetus which gave rise to communicative language teaching came from the changing educational situation in Europe. With the increase in the interdependence of European countries economically and industrially, there was a need to employ great efforts to teach adults the major languages of European Common Market and the Council of Europe. For this purpose, a group of educationists started investigating the possibility of developing language courses on a ‘unit credit’ system – a system in which learning tasks were broken down into portions or units, each of which corresponded to a component of a learner’s needs and was systematically related to all other portions, (Van Ek and Alexander 1980). This group of educationists used research studies which had been conducted to profile the needs of European language learners. The document was prepared by the British linguist, D. A. Wilkins, whose focus was on the functional or communicative definition of language. Wilkins (1976) attempted to demonstrate how systems of meanings related to the communicative use of language. Two types of meaning had
been suggested by him: ‘notional’ (involving concepts such as time sequence, quantity and location) and ‘functional’ (such as requests, denials, offers, complaints). The work of Council of Europe and some British Applied Linguists had created a significant impact on ELT, giving rise to what is now referred to as ‘Communicative Approach’ to language teaching.

3.3 Language Description in CLT

The traces of an underlying theory of language can be found in some CLT practices. Communicative theorists believe in activities that involve ‘real’ communication to promote learning. For example, activities which provoke language for carrying out meaningful tasks, promote learning; and the language which is meaningful to the learner supports learning process (Johnson 1982). Learning activities are selected according to the learners’ ability to use language in meaningful and authentic situation. Work done on communicative language teaching has provided theoretical insights which throw light on the process of language learning. Savignon (1983) surveys second language acquisition researches as a source for learning theories and considers the role of linguistic, social, cognitive and individual variables in language acquisition. Johnson (1984) and Littlewood (1984) propose a ‘skill learning model’ of communicative learning in which communicative competence can be acquired through skill development which involves both
the cognitive and behavioural aspects. This theory thus encourages emphasis on practice for the development of communicative skills.

Communicative language teaching lays emphasis on fluency rather than accuracy. It is, in fact, an approach which involves learning by doing. In communicative language teaching classroom goals are focused on all the components of communicative competence and not on grammatical or linguistic competence alone. Function is the framework and not the form through which forms are taught. The ultimate criterion for communication is the actual transmission and reception of the intended meaning in unrehearsed context (Brown 1987). Such teaching is task-based, involving question-answers, dialogues, oral practice and oral productive activities (Littlewood 1981). The teachers’ role is limited to that of a counselor and a group process manager facilitating the participants in the classroom to interact among themselves.

3.4 Testing in Communicative Language Teaching:

Testing is as important as the methods for conveying the content and achieving the purposes. Testing / evaluation assess the validity of the content whether it suits the objectives and whether the methods are appropriate for conveying the content and achieving the objectives (Murphy, 1981). A curriculum is set out for the purpose of what and how it is to be learnt in
relation to specific purposes. For the purpose of regulating and moderating these, a system of evaluation is required (Rea, 1985). Evaluation is universally accepted to be an important feature in the curriculum design, but as in the available language teaching texts, language testing has very little to do with language teaching and learning process (Rea, 1985).

In current curriculum models, evaluation is seen as a central and an integral part (Taba, 1962; Hamilton, 1976; Kelly, 1977; Richterich and Chanceral, 1980; and Perry, 1976).

Opposed to this, Shaw (1977) in one of his articles on ‘Foreign language syllabus development’ does not include evaluation at the level of syllabus design. In Munby’s Communicative Syllabus Design (1978) we find that the syllabus has nothing to do with evaluation and that testing is done only to assess the communicative competence (Alderson 1985). In contrast to it, Bell (1982) views the needs to evaluate both courses and learners and describes how to test the latter. Bell’s curriculum, like Munby’s, is based on needs analysis which serves to establish the curriculum objectives. Tests are used to examine the issues of students’ background knowledge. At the level of syllabus implementation, testing and evaluation occupies an important place despite the fact that in the handbooks for teachers, any systematic and integrated way about the role of testing and evaluation is not made explicit.
Rea (1985) observes that in *Challenges, Teacher’s Guide* (Candlin and Edelhoff, 1982) testing performs an important function in the process of learning and special reference is given to ‘formative assessment’ for diagnostic purposes and teacher-learner cooperation. However, systematic details regarding test methods, test format, test content and assessment criteria are not provided. Even in *Nucleus General Science Teacher’s Manual* (New Expanded Edition 1982), ways of testing are incorporated in the nucleus courses of instruction and how it is to be implemented. Three types of tests are dealt with in the Manual: ‘Initial proficiency check and placement’, ‘Progress and Achievement’ and a ‘Final check’ for overall achievement and proficiency. Information regarding their making, grading and interpreting of the results is to be found explicitly in the Manual. However, despite the differences in opinion whether to include or exclude testing / evaluation from the syllabus, testing is considered as an inevitable part of the teaching and learning process. It is the most sensitive and controllable area which has the maximum in terms of its goals. It is a major and creative influence for change and development in language teaching.

Heaton (1988:15-24) identifies four approaches to language testing that have been used so far:

- **The Essay Translation Approach:**
This is referred to the Pre-Scientific stage of language testing. No special skill or expertise in testing is required; the subjective judgment of teachers is considered to be of paramount importance. Tests usually consist of essay writing, translation and grammatical analysis…(15).

- **The Structural Approach:**

  The approach is characterized by the view that language learning is chiefly concerned with the systematic acquisition of a set of habits. It draws on the work of structural linguistics, in particular the importance of contrastive analysis and the need to identify and measure the learners’ mastery of the separate elements of the target language: phonology, vocabulary, and grammar. (15)

  Morrow (1979:144-145) calls this approach ‘atomistic’. He explains this term as: “an atomistic approach to test design depends utterly on the assumption that knowledge of the elements of a language is equivalent to knowledge of the language” (145).

- **The Integrative Approach:**

  This approach involves the testing of language in context and is thus concerned primarily with meaning and the total communicative effect of discourse. Consequently, integrative tests do not seek to separate language skills into neat divisions in order to improve test reliability: instead they are often designed to assess the learners’ ability to use two or more skills simultaneously. Thus integrative tests are concerned with a global view of proficiency … (16).

- **The Communicative Approach:**

  The communicative approach to language testing is sometimes linked to the integrative approach. However, although both approaches emphasise the importance of meaning of utterances rather than their form and structure, there are nevertheless fundamental differences between the two approaches. Communicative tests are concerned primarily (if not totally) with how language is used in communication … success is judged in terms of the
effectiveness of the communication which takes place rather than formal linguistic accuracy. Language ‘use’ is often emphasized to the exclusion of language ‘usage’. … In practice, however, some tests of communicative nature include the testing of usage and also assess ability to handle the formal patterns of the target language…” (19).

The role of the teachers / evaluators becomes a challenging one while testing the communicative abilities of the learners. In the survey of language teaching and testing, Morrow (1979) suggests that communicative language testing is something novel. Davies (1978) indirectly refutes this idea and claims that the assessment of communicative competence is largely pragmatic. Distinction between language competence and language performance has been discussed implicitly by a large number of language testers. Carroll (1961) contrasts knowledge as what the individual has learned with integrated performances calling upon the candidate’s mastery of language as a whole. Spolsky (1968) focuses on the need to assess a student’s ability to speak naturally on a topic other than those he has been trained for. Test contents ought to be related to such situations which are not only restricted to linguistic accuracy but also include such criteria which relate to effective communication of ideas. Student performance should be analysed in terms of the adequacy with which students can communicate in specified language use situations (Clark 1972).

The debate on communicative language testing is largely concerned with the nature of theoretical base on which the tests are constructed (Morrow 1977).
With regard to performance theory, Upsher (1971) raises a question of content validity and argues that a major reason for the stagnant state of foreign language proficiency testing has been the absence of an adequate mode of language creativity, or the communicative use of language. However, there have been significant developments in the field, especially in research into the construct of language competence and techniques for evaluating this construct (Rea 1985). But in the teaching context, there is a definite lack of guidance on the relationship between types of test and different purposes of testing; the design of item types suitable for inclusion in communicative language teaching programmes, and the appropriate selection of specific test formats and item types at different stages in the communicative teaching and learning process (Rea 1985).

Four principles have been useful in guiding the development of communicative language tests using the testing unit of ‘A Vous La Parole’ which ‘starts from somewhere’, ‘concentrate on content’, ‘bias for best’, and ‘work for washback’ – and assures a pedagogical function to language testing as well as a scientific approach to language test design and implementation (Swain 1985). The testing unit is set by the classroom teachers as a teaching unit through which the communicative language performance of individual students can be assessed.
3.4.1 Principles of Communicative Language Testing (CLT)

Communicative language tests are used to measure language learners’ ability to take part in acts of communication or to use language in real life situations. Allen and Widdowson (1979:122-142) proposed the principles of this approach to language teaching with the help of discussion on communicative tests. Some of these principles are as follows:

- “The first principle of the approach we propose, then, is that the language should be presented in such a way as to reveal its character as communication” (125). They assume an English Course for students of science in the first year of higher education, for instance.
- “Secondly, we assume that they already have some knowledge of basic science. … Hitherto, these two kinds of knowledge have existed in separation: our task is to relate them.” (125)
- “intention is to make linguistic forms as unobtrusive as possible. At the same time, we wish to make their communicative functions as obvious as possible … we are able to ‘foreground’ features of language which have particular communicative value.” (125)
- Pedagogic grammar is used in place of linguistic grammar. A pedagogic grammar is to help a learner acquire a practical mastery of a language. This grammar is required to be relevant to learners’ needs.
- An attempt is made to avoid the more mechanical types of substitution drills.

Following the models of communicative competence, a team at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) has established four principles of communicative test design:

The first principle, ‘Start from somewhere’, is intended to suggest that from both theoretical and practical viewpoint, test development should be based on the existing knowledge and examples. The study of Katsumasa (1997) and Wesche (1983) showed an agreement with this statement by confirming that
while designing a test, test makers should state carefully what they expect the test takers to perform when they use the target language in a specific context. That means the test makers must know what they want to test, on the basis of which the measuring scale and assessment criteria can be designed.

The second principle, ‘Concentration on Content’, refers both to the content of the material used as the basis of communicative language activities and the tasks used to elicit communicative language behaviour. Attention is to be paid to whether the test content matches the learners’ age, proficiency level, interests, and goals and needs. According to Carroll (1983:37), “the language tasks our learners are expected to perform in their future jobs will guide us with the tasks we will set them in our tests”.

The third principle in communicative test development is the ‘bias for best’. This means that test makers should bear in mind that they should create a test that can exploit test takers’ performance at their best. There is a good reason for this from the point of view of test interpretation. If the tester performs well, then it can be said that the learner can do what is expected of him or her when given the opportunity. However, if the tester does not, then it is not clear whether this occurs, because the tester cannot do what is expected. In other words, it is important to minimize the measurement technique of the test takers’ performance. Brown (2003) supports this principle in designing the
test. According to Brown (2003:34) ‘bias for best’ is “a term that goes little beyond how the student views the test to a degree of strategic involvement on the part of student and teacher in preparing for, setting up, and following the test itself”. Swain (1978) states that in order to create an assessment procedure which is biased for best, test makers and teachers should provide students or test takers appropriate review to help them to be well-prepared and ready for the test, suggest strategies that will be beneficial from them, and construct the test in a way that is modestly challenging to the best students/testees without overwhelming the weaker ones. (as cited in Brown, 2003:34).

The fourth and last principle guiding a test construction is to ‘work for wash back’. Wash back refers to the effect a test has on teaching practice. It has been noted that teachers will teach the content or format the test, if it is known to them. It is not particularly surprising, given the frequent use of test by educational administrators to form judgment of teachers’ effectiveness. Recognizing that neither the teacher nor the administrative behavior is likely to change, it is better to involve teacher in the construction of tests. Teachers’ involvement in test construction and management ensures adoption of teaching and learning strategies. In order to obtain a positive wash back, test writers should create clear scoring criteria that will be provided to both
teachers and test takers. Course objectives and test content are also put into consideration with the hope of promoting positive wash back. According to Wesche (1983:24), when formulating objectives, it is important to clarify (a) the purpose of the interaction concerning topics and the language functions that the learner will need, (b) the context that may impact language use, and (c) appropriate types of discourse, and the degree of skill at testees’ levels. Clarification of these factors not only promotes positive wash back but also makes it easier for test makers to choose good stimulus material that will provide necessary language forms such as structures and vocabulary.

Katsumasa (1997), citing Morrow’s (1981) study, discussed similar principles in the context of communicative language testing. These principles are (a) knowing what you are measuring, (b) measuring the ability to deal with discourse, (c) focusing on communication processes (d) setting up real situations, and (e) understanding the fact that mistakes are not always mistakes because minor grammatical mistakes do not frequently hinder communication and correct grammar is not the only requirement for successful communication. After reading and comparing the principles of communicative language test design put forth by Katsumasa and the OISE team, one sees merit in the framework of the OISE team because it involves the discussion of how to achieve beneficial wash back. Hughes (2003)
indicated that “backwash is now seen as a part of the impact a test may have on learners and teachers, on educational systems in general, and on society at large” (53).

Hughes (2003:53-57) instructs the following steps to attain positive wash back effect:

i. Test the abilities which you want to encourage;
ii. Sample widely and unpredictably;
iii. Use Direct testing;
iv. Make testing criterion-referenced;
v. Base achievement tests on objectives;
vi. Ensure the test is known and understood by students and teachers;
vii. If necessary, provide assistance to teachers;
viii. Counting the cost.

3.4.2 Characteristics of Communicative Language Testing:

The characteristics of communicative language testing can be better identified from a discussion of the most representative work in this area, such as by Morrow (1979) vis-à-vis the reactions by Weir (1981), Moller (1981), and Alderson (1981). The discussion, given below, on these lines will consequently help list the features/characteristics.

Morrow (1979:150-151) lists the features of ‘The Promised Land’. He says: “We can expect a test of communicative ability to have at least the following characteristics:

- It will be criterion-referenced against the operational performance of a set of authentic language tasks. In other words, it will set out to show whether or not (or how well) the candidate can perform a set of specified activities.
It will be crucially concerned with establishing its own validity as a measure of those operations it claims to measure. Thus, content, construct and predictive validity will be important, but concurrent validity with existing tests will not be necessarily significant.

It will rely on modes of assessment which are not directly quantitative, but which are instead qualitative…

Reliability, while clearly important, will be subordinate to face validity…”.

Morrow (1979:151-156) further claims that “designing a test with these characteristics raises a number of interesting issues” pertaining to ‘performance test’, ‘Global task’, ‘Enabling skills’, and ‘Content’ of the test.

Weir (1981:29) claims that “Morrows advocacy of more direct, performance-based tests of actual communication has not escaped criticism”. Some of these objections are as follows:

That communication is not co-terminus with language and a lot of communication is non-linguistic. In any case, the conditions for actual real-life communication are not replicable in a test situation which appears to be by necessity artificial and idealized… to use Davies phrase (1978, in Alderson and Hughes, 1981:29), Morrow is perhaps fruitlessly pursuing ‘the chimera of authenticity’.

Morrow is also found less than explicit with regard to the nature and extent of the behavioural outcomes… (29)

Reservations have also been expressed regarding Morrow’s use of the phrase ‘Performance tests’. This is so because “a performance test is a test which samples behaviours in a single test setting with no intention of generalizing beyond that setting.” (30)

Corder (1973, in Alderson and Hughes, 1981:29) noted: “The more ambitious we are in testing the communicative competence of a learner, the more administratively costly, subjective and unreliable the results are.” (31).

“Because communicative tests will involve us to a far greater extent in the assessment of actual written and oral communication, doubts have been expressed concerning time, expenditure, ease of construction, scoring,
requirements in terms of skilled manpower and equipment, in fact, about the practicability of a communicative test in all its manifestations”. (31)

Moller (1981:38-44) perceives the general purpose of a Communicative test, as proposed by Morrow, with lot of clarity, when he says that “the general purpose of communicative tests is to establish first whether communication is taking place and secondly the degree of acceptability of the communication” (38). Besides this perception, Moller (39) further goes on to define communicative language testing, as “an assessment of the ability to use one or more of the phonological, syntactic and semantic systems of the language,

i) So as to communicate ideas and information to another speaker/reader in such a way that the intended meaning of the message communicated is received and understood, and

ii) So as to receive and understand the meaning of a message communicated by another speaker/writer that the speaker/writer intended to convey”.

Moller (1981:40-41) examines the characteristics of a Communicative test (listed in table A below) as propounded by Morrow (1979:149-150) vis-à-vis the Discrete, and Integrative tests, and finds it to be the most effective with regard to these characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of a test</th>
<th>Discrete tests</th>
<th>Integrative tests</th>
<th>Communicative test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Text</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>(√)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpredictability</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this table the absence of a characteristic is marked by $\times$, the significant presence by $\sqrt{\ }$, the limited presence by $(\sqrt{\ })$, and an unclear situation by ‘?’.  

Moller (1981:40-41) considers communicative language testing as the fourth phase of the language testing in addition to the three as identified by Spolsky – the pre-scientific, the psychometric-structuralist, and the psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic phases. Moller (1981:42) makes its comparison in Table 2, given below, with other types of tests by considering the relative importance of the roles of the test constructor, the subject (or candidate), and the assessor in each of the phases of language testing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Types</th>
<th>Test Constructor</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Assessor</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-scientific</td>
<td>$(\sqrt{\ })$</td>
<td>$\sqrt{\ }$</td>
<td>$\sqrt{\ }$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychometric-Structuralist</td>
<td>$\sqrt{\ }$</td>
<td>$(\sqrt{\ })$</td>
<td>$(\ )$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psycholinguistic-Sociolinguistic</td>
<td>$(\sqrt{\ })$</td>
<td>$\sqrt{\ }$</td>
<td>$(\sqrt{\ })$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative</td>
<td>$\sqrt{\ }$</td>
<td>$\sqrt{\ }$</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Here $\sqrt{\ }$ indicates the importance of the role, $(\sqrt{\ })$ indicates minor importance, and $(\ )$ no importance. The row specified for the communicative language testing shows that there is a significant importance of the test constructor, Students, and Assessor, while in other phases there is an imbalance.

Alderson (1981:52-53) lists some of the important features of communicative language teaching as propounded by Morrow (1979). Some of these are as follows:
• It certainly emphasizes the need for testing to catch up with language teaching.
• It implicitly suggests ways in which testing might help teaching, through the specification of language use, for example, one of the advantages of a ‘testing approach’ is that it forces explicitness.
• Morrow is right to see tests as embodiments of theories, or views, of the nature of language and of language learning. This aspect of test design seems to be neglected elsewhere. As he points out, if the theory is wrong, then the validity of the test is zero.

Miyata-Boddy and Langham (2000:78-79) describes the following features of communicative language testing that distinguishes it from other types of language tests:

• Communicative language tests should have high content validity. That is, the test has to be as accurate as a reflection of the real life situation as possible.
• These tests need to be context-specific. This means that the sample of language collected and the tasks that the candidate is called upon to perform should be representative of the language and skills needed to function in the real life context.
• Agreeing to Weir (1990:12), it is claimed that tests of communicative language ability should be as direct as possible and the tasks the candidates have to perform should involve realistic discourse processing.
• Use of authentic texts and care with regard to task length and processing in real time need to be taken care of.
• Face validity is also to be related to authenticity of tasks.
• In lines with Morrow (1979), it is claimed that reliability needs to be subordinate to face validity.
• Tests of communicative spoken ability should reflect normal spoken discourse and give the candidates a chance to initiate.
• Communicative language tests should be assessed qualitatively rather than quantitatively.

3.4.3 What is to be tested in a Communicative Language Testing?
The literature that exists in answer to this question reveals a diversity of views on the interpretation of testable aspects of ‘communicative competence’ (Rea 1985). To overcome this interpretative diversity, Canale and Swain (1980) have tried to bring a coherent focus by qualifying Del Hymes’s concept of ‘communicative competence’ into the following four areas of knowledge:

i) **Grammatical Competence:** This aspect of communicative competence is understood to reflect the knowledge of the language itself. It includes “knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence grammar semantics and phonology” (Canale and Swain 1980:29). Such competence represents directly all the knowledge and skills required to understand and express correctly the literal meaning.

ii) **Socio-linguistic Competence:** Socio-linguistic competence refers to the extent to which utterances are produced and interpreted differently in different socio-linguistic situations. This was made up of “socio-cultural rules of use and rules of discourse” (Canale and Swain 1980:29). In this context ‘appropriateness of meaning’ and ‘appropriateness of form’ becomes significant.

iii) **Strategic Competence:** Strategic competence refers to the mastery of communicative strategies, used to enhance communication or to save breakdown in communication. This competence is related to “verbal and
nonverbal communicative strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence” (Canale and Swain 1980:29).

iv) **Discourse Competence:** This competence was an addition in 1983 which refers to mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken context in different genres such as narrative, descriptive or reflective writing. It concerns mastery of cohesion and coherence.

The main implication of discussing these four components of communicative competence indicates that (a) this establishes a theoretical distinction between competence and performance; and (b) that the learners need to be tested not only on his/her knowledge, but also on his/her ability to put this knowledge to use in communicative situations. Any testing programme devised to test the language, therefore, is expected to decide the purpose of test by focusing with varying degrees of emphasis on these four components.

The above aspects provided by Canale and Swain (1980) were further extended by Bachman (1990) in the form of a framework, which “attempts to characterize the processes by which the various components interact with each other and with the context in which language use occurs” (81). This framework included three components:
i) Language Competence: Bachman (1990:84) defined language competence as “a set of components that are utilized in communication via language”. Hence he adds two more competences in addition to those given by Canale and Swain (1980). These are ‘Organisational’ and ‘Pragmatic’ competences, each of which further breaks down with organizational competence covering grammatical and textual competence, and pragmatic competence covering illocutionary and socio-linguistic competence” (Miyata-Boddy & Langham 2000:78).

ii) Strategic Competence: It consists of three components – assessment, planning, and execution. “It is the mental capacity to implement language competence appropriately in the situation in which communication takes place, and involves socio-cultural and real world knowledge” (Miyata-Boddy & Langham 2000:78).

iii) Psycho-physiological mechanisms: This refers to the neurological and psychological processes involved in producing and comprehending language. Unlike Canale and Swain (1980), Bachman (1990) “acknowledges that test design and scoring might have a significant effect on the testees’ performance as a result of strategic competence.” (Miyata-Boddy & Langham 2000:78)

Weir (1990) considers Canale & Swain (1980) and Bachman (1990) as “two of the more influential models of language competence, along with several others, providing a useful framework for designing communicative language tests” (Miyata-Boddy & Langham 2000:78).

3.4.4 How to Measure and Score a Communicative Language Test

Communicative Language Tests are intended to measure how the testees are able to use language in real life situations. In testing productive skills, like speaking and writing, emphasis is placed on appropriateness rather than on
ability to form grammatically correct sentences. In receptive skills, emphasis is placed on understanding the communicative intent of the speaker/writer rather than on picking out specific details. In communicative tests the two are often combined, so that the testees must both comprehend and respond in real time, as it happens in the real life communications.

Due to the above reasons, it is said that the test-tasks are ‘communicative’ in nature. That is, they are interactive (not broken, disconnected list of sentences), context specific and situation-based (whether it is a General ELT or ESP programme); it is familiar with the format and content (based on which the tasks are designed) of the test.

Kathleen and Kitao (1996) observe that the communicative tests are:

“intended for communicative language and are judged on the extent to which they stimulate real life communicative situations rather than on how reliable the results are. … that communicative tests often carry a subjective element. That is, real life situations do not always have objectively right or wrong answers, and so band-scales need to be developed to evaluate the results”.

In task-based language assessment, therefore, we are interested in eliciting and evaluating students’ abilities to accomplish particular tasks, or task types in which the target language communication is essential. Such assessment is obviously performance assessment because a student’s second language performance on the task gets evaluated. These performance based tasks for
communicative tests can be: Information giving or seeking, letter writing, summarizing, note-taking/making, comparing and contrasting, expressing views, organizing and writing advertisements, and so on. These tests can be presented in the form of role plays, realia, etc.

As test makers assess learners’ performance, they need to establish ‘scoring criteria’. The scoring procedure developed for a test should reflect the use which the test is intended for and the theoretical frame work which initially guides the test framework. This is possible only if in the test, each task is scored for grammatical, socio-linguistic, discourse, and strategic aspects of communicative language performance. The approach has to begin comprehensively, using a mixture of objective and subjective judgments. The four principles, ‘start from somewhere’, ‘concentrate on content’, bias for best’, and work for wash back’, assure a pedagogical function to language testing as well as a scientific approach. Norris et al (1998) provides a guideline for developing scoring criteria for evaluating students’ performance on a task. Bachman (1990:119) grouped test method facets into the following five categories:

i. Testing environment, including familiarity of the place and equipment, personnel, time of testing, and physical condition;

ii. Test rubrics involving test organization, time allocation, and instruction;
iii. The nature of the input, concerning format, and nature of language;
iv. The nature of the expected response, referring to format, nature of language, and restrictions on response;
v. The relationship between input and response in language tests whether reciprocal, nonreciprocal or adaptive relations.

Bachman (1990) and Danili and Reid (2006) also take into consideration the ‘attributes of individual’ as an important factor for test-makers. These attributes refer to such aspects as individual and group characteristics of learners, their cognitive styles (field dependent/independent), convergent/divergent, etc. Even random or unsystematic, that are unpredictable and largely temporary it is the local conditions/factors that affect the test-makers.

3.5 **Mechanics of Communicative Test Construction:**

Communicative testing, like other language tests, is an integral part of language teaching process, and it involves various types and techniques premised on the characteristics and principles of communicative theory of language testing. Therefore, it has to undergo certain stages of careful test construction. The stages discussed, in the present chapter, are mere suggestions to be followed in order to avoid the tests from being unreliable and invalid. They are subject to addition, subtraction, or modification. It is supposed to achieve a well-defined objective through a neatly drafted test. For
the purpose the present chapter briefly puts forward its content in two sections: Stages of Communicative Test Construction and Examples of Communicative Tests.

3.5.1 Stages of Communicative Test Construction:

These stages go as follows:

a. Setting up the objective:

Before one goes on to frame a test, the test setter is supposed to be clear about the audience (learners) and the purpose of the test. The objective of the test can be better sorted out if the test maker has an answer to the following and other related queries (Hughes 1989:48):

- What is the purpose of the test? Is it going to be a placement, progress, or diagnostic test?
- What technique(s) of test (multiple-choice, true-false, cloze, or C-test) will be most suitable for the above purpose?
- How important is the test backwash?
- How detailed and accurate must the test be?
- What are the constraints regarding expertise, facilities, and time, etc for construction, administration and scoring of the test?

The test objective can be visualized best if the above questions are discussed by a group of professional teachers/test-makers and the line of action is followed in the framing of the actual test. Efforts should be made to gather information on tests that have been designed for similar situations (Hughes 1989:48).
b. Pre-writing Stage:

Once the objectives are sorted out, the process of writing the test can be initiated. But even at this stage one needs to have clear information about the content, format, timing, level of learners’ performance and scoring procedures.

i. Content: A language test is meant mainly to assess the learners’ command over the language skills. Therefore, while writing down a test one should keep the test objective in mind and set a content familiar to the learners. It should not be alien to the learners because the aim is to test the performance skill (the ‘how-ness’ of communication) rather than the knowledge base (the ‘what-ness’ of communication). At the same time the content will vary from one skill or sub-skill to the other, depending on the test, its type and its techniques in use. The content of a test needs to be subject-situation specific as far as possible.

ii. Operations: This suggests specification of the task to be carried out by the learners. For a reading test the tasks can be ‘scan a text to locate certain information’, ‘a passage for testing comprehension’, or ‘guess meaning of unknown words from context’.

iii. Types of text: This refers to the test format. For a writing test it can be writing a formal or informal letter, writing a fax, or a report, etc.

iv. Addressees: These are the learners for whom the test is intended. Here most of the variables relating to learners, like native/non-native, sex, age, etc., are to be taken care of.

v. Topics: Topics are selected according to suitability of the candidates and the type of test.

vi. Format and Timing: This refers to the overall structure of the test, like statement regarding the test component, allocation of time and marks, etc.

vii. Critical levels of performance: This hints at the required levels of performance for different levels of success. This generally differs from one institution to the other. The Royal Society of Arts (RSA) Test for the Communicative Use of English as a Foreign Language refers to accuracy, appropriacy, range, flexibility, and size for the above purpose.

viii. Scoring procedure: The main intention should be high scorer reliability. An attempt should be made to keep the scoring objective as far as possible.

c. Writing the Test:
It is not that the above two stages of forming a test are not thought of by the test makers. Rather, they are either very often casually thought of in a haphazard manner or the test makers have to work under certain well-defined aims, objectives and scoring keys drafted by an administrative body. Tests, formed in both the cases, carry some major lacunae at the level of meeting the test objective, setting the text, operation, or scoring. The best way, therefore, is to form a test in a regulated way which should go through a group of teachers who are involved in actual teaching. For instance, while scoring a test it is often found that there is more than one acceptable answer and ultimately, the scoring procedure ceases to be objective. Such problems can be avoided if every aspect of a test is presented before a group of experts for discussion. This shows that writing a test is not a casual activity. Rather, it involves serious thinking at various levels. A final version of the test has to go through following stages (Hughes 1989:50):

i. Sampling: This relates mainly to the ‘content’ of the test. The test maker has to take care of the content validity and of constructive back wash. It is not proper either to concentrate on the easily predictable test, or to have a task/text quite alien to the learner. One should not forget that the aim in a language test is to assess the skill rather than the knowledge base.

ii. Moderation of the Written Test: A test written by an individual alone is bound to have weakness. It just can not be effective and foolproof, because it is the product of one mind. It is always better, therefore, to moderate the test after being written by the test maker, so that some items will have to be rejected, altered or reworked. It is best possible only through a team work. A team work as usual expects the members to be receptive, broad-minded and
tolerant to criticism. At this stage we need to match the test to the needs of the earlier two stages by raising such questions as:

- Does the test meet its overall objective?
- Is the task perfectly clear and bears no ambiguity?
- Is there more than one possible correct response?
- Are the test instructions clear and unambiguous to the audience/learners?
- Can the task be performed within a given period of time?

iii. Moderation of Scoring Key: Once the content, text and tasks are finalized, equal attention should be paid to the scoring key. And this should always be done in the presence of experienced test makers before the conducting of the test. The members of the group are supposed to suggest all possible answers to the questions and have to finalize equal distribution of marks. Generally, in actual practice, sorting out of all possible answers to a question is not done before the test is conducted. This often leads to an argument among examiners regarding the acceptability of such answers which are correct but are not included in the scoring key. As a result scoring becomes subjective. At this stage one has to think even of the extent of acceptability, correctness, and error tolerance among the examiners.

iv. Pre-testing: Despite all sincere efforts at the earlier stages in the process of writing a test, some problems are left unseen. So it is better if the test is put in use for the group of learners of the same level for which the test has been formed. And all the problems in administration, understanding of the test by learners or scoring are noted carefully. Pre-testing is that stage which takes care of such problems in a test which are not seen even by the moderators.

3.5.2 Examples of Communicative Tests:

The present chapter will appear incomplete, if it does not take into consideration as to how the techniques have been exploited for language
testing by the communicative approach of the four basic language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing.

3.5.2.1 **Listening Tests:**

Most of the tests incorporated so far in the name of testing listening can be grouped into two sets of approaches. The first set refers to such tests that treat “listening as a tool to evaluate the learners’ proficiency by responding to simple commands. Listening is used as a means to evaluating low level proficiency in grammar and pronunciation” (Madsen 1983:127). The second set of tests use listening “to evaluate more advanced integrative skills – for instance by means of dictation” (Madsen 1983: 127). Both these sets of listening tests evaluate some or other sub skills of listening. Dictation, for instance, evaluates the learners’ perception of sounds as produced by the speaker, spelling and grammatical aspects if a series of sentences or paragraphs are being dictated. These tests, therefore, are not wholesome in nature and they are far removed from the actual communication. Such tests fail to realize that listening is an integral part of speaking and it is through this skill that the learning / acquisition begins. A child initially listens to many sounds produced by the people around. The aim of listening test, therefore, should be to evaluate ‘proficiency’ in the listening skill, i.e. listening comprehension. The two sets of tests, as referred to above, assess only the
linguistic aspects of a language, while the comprehension test is concerned with broader communication that involves exchange of facts and ideas plus interpreting the speakers’ intentions. That means listening comprehension enlists recognition of words, structures, and such pronunciation features as accent, stress, intonation, idiolects, dialects, slang, and registers. For an effective listening comprehension one needs to know all the aspects that work in a speech delivery for better communication.

Madsen (1983) categorizes the following ways of listening tests under three heads for both the beginning adult and the children:

a) **Limited Response:**

This set of listening tests is purely for beginners who are not able to read and write in the target language. This involves flexible techniques which can also be framed for adult learners with intermediate or advanced skills. This set of listening tests is limited to classes with bilingual teachers and learners with the same language background.

Madsen (1983) finds the following three effective ways to test the beginning adults or children:

i) **Native-language Responses:**

During the early days of instruction, a test can be given to the beginners in the form of quiz. Here, a series of random sentences in English can be taped and
be intermingled with utterances in two or three other languages. Students after
listening to these tapes will have to identify and differentiate ‘English’ from
other languages.

For slightly advanced learners, true-false questions can be used with multiple
options/choices. This test will depend on how much vocabulary the learners
have acquired.

Another approach is to have learners listen to single utterances, dialogues or
short lectures where they could then answer questions on this material in their
native language.

ii) Picture Cues:

This is one of the most traditional approaches where the visuals are used to
test listening. For this purpose a set of three or four related pictures or a single
picture with sketches including a variety of activities can be used. Learners
can be asked here to identify pictures or to respond to yes-no questions. Even
true-false questions can be framed for the purpose.

iii) Task Responses:

These tests can be conducted on individuals or groups. Learners are supposed
to respond to the instructions or tasks given to them. This will help in
assessing their understanding of the language. This is used on advanced
beginners. A drawing task or directions on a map can be given as test to the learners.

b) **Multiple-choice Appropriate Response:**

This set of listening test is fast and easy to correct with consistent and reliable scores. Above all, it is an integrative, communicative measure of listening. Some of its limitations are that it is difficult to prepare, and secondly, cheating/copying is easily possible, unless alternate forms are used. Madsen (1983) specifies three guidelines to be followed while preparing multiple-choice appropriate-response items to test listening comprehension.

i) **Focus on Meaning:**

The main objective here is to measure learners’ understanding of a particular utterance. Therefore, the questions should not be ambiguous by any means. Only those vocabulary and grammar items are to be used which the learners know.

ii) **Keep the options simple:**

Framing options to a question expects a serious thinking on the part of the examiner. They have to be careful, in framing simple and unambiguous options, and secondly, only one option should be the correct answer. Any sort of carelessness can spoil the question.
iii) Learn to Adjust the difficulty of the items:

The intention here is to frame such questions which meet the levels of learners, at the level of meaning or option or the overall understanding of the question. The level of the difficulty of the question should be regulated depending on the learners’ levels. This is possible by adding comments, by paraphrasing, or by framing questions on a dialogue.

c) Testing Extended Communication:

Testing of listening as extended communication is conducted at an advanced level of learning. This is not possible with the beginners. Students at the college level, especially those who go for higher education, have to understand lectures and talks in the classroom, interact with other students, participate in the seminars and discussions, have to listen to and understand radio and TV programmes, and so on. Extended communication tests come very close to the real life situations. At the same time, it is easy to correct and to score consistently and reliably. It is an integrative, communicative measure of listening.

These tests can be conducted in various contexts, such as:

i) Short lecture Contexts:
These refer to such tests where a written text is read out orally which the students listen to and respond. But these tests are unreal in the sense that they are far removed from the actual real-life talks. They do not have, for instance, the very normal and natural redundancies that people use in real talks and lectures. One way to make the test look real is to tape actual lectures. It is better not to opt for a long lecture as a test. The taped materials should be balanced and brief. The questions framed on these materials for the purpose of test should cover all the types of students normally available in a classroom.

ii) **Social / Business Context:**

Some other contexts for listening comprehension tests can be those situations which one generally faces or is supposed to face in future. These situations can be radio and TV commercials, excerpts from radio programmes or plays, various social conversations including the phone calls and many other business transactions. The questions framed on these contexts can be direct information seeking or suggestive questions. These questions can be True-false, Multiple-choice or even Fill-in-the-blanks. It is always better to have a good recording of actual social and business situation. For example, one can tape an actual announcement of the trains’ arrivals and departures. For an
effective listening test the recording, the voice of the speaker, and the equipment are a few basic requirements.

3.5.2.2 Speaking Tests:

Preparing, administering and scoring a speaking test is the most challenging of all language skill tests. Most of the scoring of speaking tests are impressionistic. It is so because it is difficult to fix an evaluating criterion for lack of its well-defined nature. Speaking includes such items as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, appropriateness and acceptability. It also includes factors like listening comprehension, correct tone, stress, intonation, etc. But “an international survey of speaking tests shows that scoring is done mainly of some major aspects. It was found that of 74 examinations evaluated, 81 percent evaluated grammar, 71 percent fluency, 67 percent vocabulary, 66 percent pronunciation, 63 percent appropriateness, and 37 percent other matters” (Madsen 1983:147). The main problem why certain aspects are not stressed upon is the problem of how to test it. An example for this can be fluency. And above all there is a disagreement about which aspect should be given how much of weight. Besides these the speaking skill has a wide range of oral communication. For different levels of learners a few speaking activities have to be identified. Some of these will be discussed under the following heads:
a) **Limited Response:**

Learners with limited speaking skill can be evaluated by using rather controlled methods. Here, the learners are required to produce connected speech in a given situation very similar to the real life situations. Three of the most useful ways are:

i) **Directed Response:**

Because learners here are just the beginners, they are given a situation to frame a sentence. For instance, the examiner can ask the learner *tell me that you speak French*; or the examiner can ask the learner the *whereabouts of his friend*.

ii) **Picture Cues:**

Picture cues are often used to help beginning learners – children or adults – participate in a language. It is important to take simple pictures of some actions on the basis of which learners can be asked questions about the action or the place of action. We can also encourage learners to give one-word answers. More advanced learners can be given a map or a picture sequence with a wide spectrum. Testing speaking expects even the learners to participate and encourage learners to speak out. Even charts and graphs can be used with matured learners.
iii) **Reading Aloud:**

This has its own advantages and disadvantages. The good thing is that all learners respond in the same way so a comparison can be made between them to evaluate them in a better way. These tests are even easy to be prepared and administered. And most of the aspects of speaking can be covered for assessment. One major limitation of this technique is that it is not actual speaking. Of course some of the features are same. But this, for instance, does not access interaction, creativity, etc.. Still this test can be used in order to test the beginners. In the first type of reading passage it is intended to reflect the specific points under test, for example, pronunciation, stress, tone and intonation.

Limited response items, therefore, includes useful techniques for those who have limited control over this skill. These techniques do not make learners afraid of the tests. Rather they expect helpful and encouraging attitudes on the part of the teachers and make the learners speak out.

b) **Guided Techniques:**

This technique is applied on advanced learners who can frame connected speech and who have a limited sense of the politeness principle, etc. It comes very close to the limited response techniques. Here again, for the purpose of consistency in comparing the learners and rating their oral abilities, their
performance is guided by the examiners. They follow the guided-response
techniques of paraphrase, explanation, and guided role play. While guiding
the learners’ response, the learners have to keep in mind what is intended to
be tested.

i) Paraphrase:

As the term suggests, the learners are read out a story loudly by the teacher
and then the learners are supposed to paraphrase the story and say it again to
the teacher. Here both speaking and listening go together.

ii) Explanation:

In this technique of testing, learners are given a text to read silently and then
interpret or explain the ideas to the teacher. Here a graph, a recipe or a table
can also be given to the learners for this purpose. This technique also includes
the description of an object, person or process.

iii) Guided Role Play:

This can be tried out with an outgoing group of learners who are at the
advanced level of the speaking skill. This expects more participation on the
part of learners. In the present context, learners are given a situation in which
(s)he is supposed to go into a dialogue with teacher.

c) Oral Interview:
The oral interview provides an actual situation of communication. Interview, as the general impression goes, does not mean merely answering the question. It is a technique to test the learners’ fluency and proficiency in the language along with their knowledge base. A perfect coordination is possible between the teacher and the learner during the oral interview. In order to standardize this technique the teacher has to guide the whole situation. The oral interview generally starts with a simple question and in due course goes into a discussion. This type of test is time-consuming, but it is the most communicative of all language skill tests.

3.5.2.3 Reading Tests:

Testing reading in the present study refers basically to ‘reading comprehension’. That is responding to a written form of communication. Like other skills of communication, reading too plays a vital role. Reading as a skill includes such aspects like silent reading, reading aloud, reading speed, reading literature, and skimming and scanning techniques, etc. Madsen (1983) enlists reading tests under the following three heads:

a) Limited-response Techniques:

This technique of testing is meant purely for beginners, children or adults. It is confined only to the recognition of words at the phonemic or lexical levels. The aspect under testing over here is whether the learner can differentiate
between two sets of identical words. These tests are quite easy to construct and score. This set of tests does not access the integrative skill involving actual reading. At the same time, an overemphasis of this technique reduces the reading speed.

The most typical test of this skill is the “same-different” technique, where a set of two identical words are given to be recognized rapidly as similar or different. Another test is meant where the students have to identify the odd one out from a list of three words at the level of spelling or letters. A third form of test uses a key word to be rapidly matched with the similar word in the list of three or four words. For these tests the directions given to the learners have to be very simple rather should be given in the learners’ mother-tongue. It is always better to give an example. These tests are generally supposed to be completed rapidly within a given period of time.

b) Testing Sentence Comprehension:

This includes such tests which can be conducted on those beginners who are little advanced than the earlier group. This must precede passage comprehension. Here the learners are expected to have a grasp over vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and sometimes even social appropriateness. But again this is not an integrative skill involving actual reading. An overemphasis on this technique too will affect the reading speed.
These tests can be designed purely for beginners and they can be more challenging to be used with more advanced learners. This technique can be applied in the following tests of elicitation:

i) Picture Cues:

For this purpose, the learners can be given a set of pictures to be matched by them with the sentences. From the same pictures even ‘true-false’ questions can be framed. Or on the basis of one group photograph various questions can be framed on the same lines. While making these tests the testers have to be careful of the level of students in using the words and expressions.

ii) Phrase and Sentence Cues:

This will help to test the learners understanding of some commonly used phrases and expressions, like “Keep off the grass”, “Help wanted”, “No Trespassing”, etc. Another set of simple sentence comprehension test can be ‘true-false’. Here some factual questions from the passage can be given. A third type of test can be made on the basis of recognition of sign. The test of signs can be done by matching the signs with the sentences having their meanings or locations. It all depends on the learners’ age and interests because some of the signs – like “High Voltage”, “No Loitering”, “Open other end”, and “Please do not litter” – requires learners to be familiar with new vocabulary items and grammatical structures. Still another set of tests
can be the use of paraphrase to check for more detailed comprehension of phrases and structures. Preparing these tests requires some sort of care and caution. One should not give such factual questions which are removed from the learners’ knowledge base; secondly, it is better to have the learners’ culture base in mind; and finally, while framing multiple-choice questions, the choice should carry no ambiguity at all.

c) Testing Passage Comprehension:

The earlier two sets of tests are meant to assess learners whose reading skill is quite limited. But the present testing technique expects a broader knowledge base among the learners. Under the above head, it will not be proper to test only a running written text. Rather, it should include varieties of reading materials which one goes through in his/her lifetime. It can range from the usual articles, stories and essays to advertisements, want ads, business and social letters, sales agreements, bank statement, tables and graphs, notes, memos and notices and various other booklets and pamphlets. This will be the most integrative type of reading test which is objective and easy to score and it can evaluate learners at every level of reading development. Such passage comprehension is more time consuming, but they are wholesome too in the sense that they have to apply all the reading techniques like scanning, skimming, making inferences, etc. Framing questions on the basis of a
passage is not an easy job. It requires skill to frame unambiguous questions covering all the language items. Madsen (1983:87-95) suggests two types of question techniques, one for beginners and the other for advanced learners:

i) **Question Techniques for beginners:**

For beginners he suggests ‘True-False items’ and ‘Matching techniques’ on the basis of short passages.

- **True false items:**

These are easier to frame in comparison to the regular multiple-choice questions for the beginners. This test is meant mainly to assess the learners’ understanding of the text at the content level. It checks whether learners have perceived the right information given in the text.

- **Matching techniques:**

Even this technique tests the understanding of the text. Here both the questions and answers are lifted directly from the given text. Seeing the level of learners, little opportunity of making inference is given. This technique can also be used to test the vocabulary.

ii) **Question Techniques for more Advanced Learners:**

- **Standard Multiple-choice:** This is one of the many ways to test reading where a series of multiple-choice questions follows a passage. For the
tests it is always better to have some interesting topics according to the interest and level of learners. The length of passages generally varies from 35 – 75 words for a short passage and from 100 – 300 words for a longer passage. Learners’ comprehension of the reading passage can be found out through a variety of questions, like paraphrase, synthesis, inference, etc. While framing these questions a number of problems are to be avoided. One problem, for instance, can be avoided by not asking the questions in the same words or phrases as used in the passage; secondly, by avoiding illogical distracters; thirdly such questions should not be asked which are of general nature. When a set of questions is drafted, it is better to give it to other colleagues for vetting. It can also be assessed by piloting it in the actual classroom before the actual test takes place.

Another way of testing reading comprehension is known as Multiple-choice Cloze, which measures overall proficiency. This test is suitable for those learners who have an understanding of some or other grammar items, but lack productive skill. In such a situation, a multiple-choice cloze helps learners rely on their recognition of the needed word.

**3.5.2.4 Writing Tests:**

Writing is one such skill which has been tested heavily through the ages. Before the emergence of the Communicative approach, a language test meant
testing ‘writing’, where other skills were either ignored or were given least importance. That is why we have an abundance of test varieties for ‘writing’, like Pre-Writing Tests, Guided Writing, and Free Writing Tests. These tests consist of a variety of writing items ranging from formal to informal ones like literature writing, journalism, note taking, reporting to the personal writing. All these tests require different types of evaluation. A writing test involves such aspects of writing as mechanics (spelling and punctuation), vocabulary, grammar, appropriate content, diction, rhetorical matters of various kinds (like organization, cohesion, unity, appropriateness, topic and occasion), as well as sophisticated concerns such as logic and style. In most of the ESL courses, literary writing, logic and style are generally avoided, because they are higher abilities which are achieved through continuous writing over the years. Some of the test types are as follows:

a) **Limited Response:**

i) **Techniques for Evaluating Pre-writing:**

This set of writing tests includes such pre-writing activities as sentence combining, expansion or combination of sentence elements, copying or oral cloze.

- **Sentence combining:**
Among others, combining sentences means adding sentences by connectives or conjunctions. By doing so, learners reflect their understanding of such connectives that indicate addition (like and, moreover, furthermore), contrasts (like but, however, nevertheless), and results (like so, consequently, therefore). Sentences are also combined by making grammatical changes.

- **Sentence Expansion:**

This is another set of pre-writing test. This requires one to add such words as adjectives and adverbs or phrases and clauses.

- **Sentence Reduction:**

Like the earlier ones even this relates to the sentences which provide a cue word which are generally relative adjectives or relative pronouns like who, which, where, and other Whs. These establish a relationship between the sentence and the clauses.

- **Copying:**

This makes the learners aware of such writing mechanics as spelling and punctuation.

- **Oral Cloze:**
This combines dictation and the cloze test of simple selected grammar items. It is a type of oral cloze test where the learners listen to the text and then fill in the missing words.

ii) **Techniques for Evaluating Beginning Writing:**

This is done with little advanced learners. In these tests learners are required to deal with such aspects as changing statements into questions and vice versa, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, sequencing the sentences, etc. etc. These tests are generally quite easy to construct and are suitable for learners with limited ability in English. These are good for objective rating of the test. But at the same time these do not involve actual activity.

b) **Guided Writing:**

As the name suggests this test intends to assess learners’ ability to handle controlled or directed writing tasks. This involves such activities as dictation, text manipulation, i.e. making certain changes in a story, or to expand the outline of an article. A few of them are as follows:

i) **Testing Specialized Skills:**

Some sensitized skills like spelling and punctuation are best tested through dictation of problem words. Some unpunctuated sentences or paragraphs can be given to learners to be corrected. Regarding testing unity and organization
in a paragraph, learners can be asked to sort out the irrelevant sentence(s) from a jumbled paragraph.

ii) **Changing a Passage:**

Here the learner is given a passage with instruction to be followed in order to change the paragraph. The learners are supplied with the content. They just have to correct the grammatical accuracy in the rewritten passage. Another task can be where the learners are asked to bring certain grammatical changes (e.g. changing from passive to active) in a passage and they are given examples at the beginning of the task. Another can be where learners are asked to change the first person narration into the third person narration.

iii) **Building a Paragraph Outline:**

This type of task is given to evaluate learners dealing with handling of content and grammar. Here, at times, grammatical accuracy is sacrificed in the name of content. This task involves actual writing. Guided writing tests, therefore, are quick and easy to construct. Here, the learners are not supposed to struggle with what to write. Their main concern is how to write.

c) **Free Writing:**
A free writing task expects learners to handle the two major aspects of writing: ‘what to write’ and ‘how to write’. Here at the most learners are asked to write freely on a certain given topic. No suggestion, information or guidelines are given to be followed by the learners. For the convenience of scoring it is good to ask learners to write on the same topic. This task is most suitable for the intermediate or advanced level of learners. The main concern here is the effectiveness of the total composition including sentence-level accuracy, unity, coherence and organization, as well as effectiveness in conveying the ideas.

Despite its limitations free writing makes the best assessment of overall writing ability in the real sense of the term. This gives learners a freedom of ‘how to write’ and ‘what to write’. Scoring free writing is little bit difficult and time consuming because it does not consist of objectivity.

3.6 Problems of Communicative Language Testing:

Designing tests, premised on communicative approach to language teaching, is not an easy task. It is a real challenge for the test designers due to the detailed, much defined features, such as validity, reliability, feasibility, criterion referenced, performance based, and qualitative assessment of productive skills. This creates a huge responsibility in terms of reliability and validity in a communicative language test.
One major problem in communicative language testing relates to ‘assessment’. Weir (1990:13) points out that “the holistic and qualitative assessment of productive skills, and the implications of this for test reliability, needs to be taken on board”. Wesche (1983:46) suggest that “the more specific and limited the second-language objectives are, the more precise and complete can be the performance evaluation”. Wesche (1983:46) further elaborates the expectations of a communicative language test, when he says

“But where communicative tasks are used to measure global proficiency in courses with general objectives, it is essential that the underlying communicative rule systems rather than specific learned routines appropriate to a given context be tested. It has been suggested that the ability to use the linguistic code is the most context free and thus the most generalizable of communicative abilities … It may also be possible to define “enabling” or “subsidiary skills” which underlie many different communicative acts, as the appropriate focus for general purpose communicative testing”.

Such expectations and specifications of a communicative language test fixes a lot of responsibility on test designing as a whole, including the expertise, experience and training of the test designer, the very mechanics of test construction, and its piloting before the actual test takes place.

The above problem refers to the larger problem of establishing appropriate and reliable scoring criteria and procedures for communicative tests. With regard to this issue, Wesche (1983:47) specifies:
“If the purpose of testing is diagnostic or to evaluate progress in a language training program, detailed scoring grids might be in order, whereas global native speaker judgements of whether or not the learner has the requisite second language communication skills might be more appropriate for placement or entrance requirements … The construction of scoring grids to reflect these criteria, and, where needed, the training of raters to judge performance, present other sticky problems in communicative test construction for which there are no definitive answers.”

In the Criterion-referenced interpretation of test scores, the candidate’s ability is defined “in terms of his successful completion of tasks from a set or domain of criterion tasks or his performance with reference to a criterion level that defines the ability in question” (Bachman 1990:210). This means that the scores provide information about the candidate’s ability to perform in a language rather than in his/her ability relative to other candidates.

However, this raises another problem regarding the rating scales used. As Brindley (1991:144) points out, although the scales are widely accepted, it is very difficult to find any empirical basis for them.

Another difficulty that the test designer faces, pertains to predictive validity. While designing a test of communicative ability, identifying test takers’ needs based on communicative encounters is one of the basic principles. However, it is not certain if test makers can guarantee that test takers performing well on a test in a class are also able to do well outside the classroom in a real life situation. One reason for this is that real life communication is characterized
by unpredictability. Studies have proved that test designers have tried to make real-life tasks, but encountered difficulties from the varied or diverse nature of contexts of the learners (Katsumasa, 1997; Brown, 2003).

The test designers also have to take care of the task format, because the method of testing can have a significant effect on test performance. Bachman (1991:674) notes that “a number of empirical studies conducted in the 1980s clearly demonstrated that the kind of test tasks used can affect test performance as much as the abilities we want to measure”.

Sampling and extrapolation of results is another major challenge in communicative language testing. The test designers, here, endeavour to include contexts and tasks which reflect those which the candidates will encounter in real life. However, the specificity of the contexts reduces the generalizability of the information generated. One way of obtaining a wholesome sample of the candidate’s language would be to include as many tasks as possible. Bachman (1991:681) states that in order to make inferences or predictions” we need to demonstrate two kinds of correspondences – a) that the language abilities measured by our language tests correspond in specifiable ways to the language abilities involved in nontest language use, and b) that the characteristics of the test tasks correspond to the features of a target language use context.”
The above problems/ issues have been recognized and steps have been taken to address them. In case of rater reliability, Weir (1990:76) has made it possible to include subjective measures in serious language testing through “sufficient training and standardization of examiners to the procedures and scales employed”, in order to obtain high rater reliability. Clark and Swinton (1979, cited in Weir, 1990) report average intra-rater reliabilities of 0.867 and inter-rater reliabilities of 0.75 for FSI type interviews. Besides such studies many innovations and experimentation of test design have been made over a period of time, that tried to meet the requirements of communicative language testing. To name a few, they are: CITO Functional Dialoge Language Tests, Functional Test for English as a Second Language Students at ULCA, Royal Society of Arts Examination in the Communicative Use of English as a Foreign Language, and others.

3.7 **Summing up**

The present chapter, thus, surveys the factors responsible for the development of the communicative language teaching and testing, its theoretical premises, its features, principles, and problems. In the process, it also takes a bird’s eye view of the stages / mechanics of communicative test construction. The techniques for testing communicative skills are dealt separately – for listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. The main idea in presenting this
survey is to provide a feel of the ways in which the communicative approach of testing has brought in a change in the content, canvas, and compatibility of language testing.

References:


