



Evaluating Across Borders: Innovative Practices In The Assessment Of Language Skills

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Abstract. In today's context of globalization and technological change, the assessment of language skills transcends conventional boundaries. This article explores innovative practices in language assessment in depth, highlighting contemporary challenges, emerging solutions, and the ethical issues that arise from them.

This work highlights the critical importance of assessing language skills in an increasingly interconnected world. It sets out the educational and societal implications of this evolution, marked by technological advances and increasing linguistic diversity.

We will discuss the impact of technological developments in the assessment of language skills, such as speech recognition, artificial intelligence and e-learning platforms that have transformed the nature of language assessment. We will analyze in detail how these advancements enable a more interactive and contextual assessment, providing opportunities for real-time evaluation and immediate feedback.

Next, we will discuss online assessment platforms and speech recognition tools, since today the use of speech recognition guarantees a more authentic assessment of language skills. We will also take an in-depth look at the benefits and challenges of these tools in the context of linguistic diversity.

Since equity challenges in the assessment of language skills are a central focus of our article, the focus will be on inclusive approaches to ensure fair and accurate assessment for learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

We will also offer an in-depth exploration of concrete cases and practical examples illustrating the successful implementation of innovative practices in the assessment of language skills. These case studies cover different educational contexts, ranging from traditional classroom environments to online learning programs.

We will conclude our work with a reflection on emerging trends and future prospects in the field of language skills assessment. Practical recommendations are formulated to guide education stakeholders in the judicious adoption of innovative practices while maintaining an ethical balance.

Keywords: Technology – E-learning – Remote assessment – language skills

1 Introduction

In a technologically advanced and ever-changing world, and in the contemporary context of accelerated globalization and rapid digital advances, language proficiency is of paramount importance for interpersonal communication, which remains an essential pillar of human interaction, learning and progress both professionally and societally. The importance of mastering a language goes far beyond just the ability to exchange words; It underpins mutual understanding, international collaboration and the building of strong intercultural relations. As a result, the assessment of language skills has become a crucial issue and a fundamental pillar in the field of modern education, constantly adapting to new challenges and technological advances and above all guaranteeing the actors in the field the development of essential language skills to adapt and prosper in an increasingly globalized and diversified environment.

However, the assessment of language skills faces many challenges. The traditional boundaries of language teaching are constantly evolving, while technological advances are opening up new perspectives, but also raising complex ethical questions about the validity, fairness and relevance of existing assessment methods. In this dynamic context, it is imperative to explore innovative assessment practices that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries while meeting the diverse needs of learners.

This introduction thus undertakes to lay the foundations for our exploration of innovative methods and approaches to assessing language skills, highlighting current challenges, opportunities and emerging solutions. We will take a close look at the technological developments that are reshaping the landscape of language assessment, and their impact on traditional assessment methods, while addressing the ethical issues that arise from them. In addition, we will look at case studies and practical examples illustrating the implementation of these practices in various educational contexts, focusing on data privacy, algorithm transparency, and fairness of outcomes.

In sum, this article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of current trends and future perspectives, rich and nuanced, in the field of language skills assessment. By exploring the technological world that transcends conventional boundaries, we aspire to pave the way for a more equitable, inclusive and effective assessment that can meet technological and digital demands.

Ultimately, our goal is to contribute to the continuous improvement of language skills assessment, in order to prepare learners to succeed in a multilingual and interconnected world.

We first focus on the concept of competence and the importance of assessing language skills at the international level in order to unmask and highlight the limits of traditional assessment practices in a globalized context. We will then present the practices of assessing language skills that are riding the wave of globalization and responding to the challenges of change.

2 The Nature of the Jurisdiction

Through the centuries, and with the aim of keeping up with change and global development and above all in order to meet professional needs and societal expectations. The design of the skill has been subject to various alterations and variations.

In this first part, we will present some definitions that have marked the evolution of this concept.

"Since the Middle Ages, this notation has been used in the singular and attached to the verb to have to legitimize and recognize the power and authority of a structure, particularly a legal structure, to act: "it has competence to..." Chaboissier and Letourneau, 2002, p.27

From the end of the seventeenth century, jurisdiction refers by extension, according to Robert, "... a thorough, recognized knowledge that confers the right to judge or decide in certain ways. »

Beginning with the year 1965, when Chomsky presents us with his own definition of the concept of competence and defines it as the set of internalized rules, a faculty that allows one to "pronounce an infinite number of different sentences." Chomsky imposes competence on performance, which represents the physical and contextualized practice of competence. This definition maintains Chomsky's character as a generic faculty.

In 1974, Hymes questioned the Chomskyan notion and broadened the concept by scratching the sociolinguistic components so as not to limit it to cognitive and linguistic components. According to him, competence goes beyond grammar or simply constructing different sentences. He emphasizes that "communicative competence requires a functional study of language in order to arrive at the communicative option and therefore competence." The linguistic and sociolinguistic aspect must be taken into consideration when installing language skills since the members of a community share the same codes that they will later use in interpersonal communication. In response to Chomsky's perspective, Hymes emphasizes the importance of social and cultural factors in language competence and performance.

According to Sophie Moirand (1982), communicative competence has four components: linguistic, discursive, referential and sociolinguistic.

For several years, the concept of "competence" remained fixed and enclosed, as soon as schools adapted to a new approach called "competence-based", Philippe Meirieu defined competence in 1989 as "identified knowledge involving one or more capacities in a given notional or disciplinary field. More precisely, competence can be called the ability to associate a precisely identified class of problems with a specific treatment program."

It would be necessary to mention the definition proposed in 2000 by Jean-Denis Mofet, which characterises language competence as "one of the transversal competences about which we all agree that it is important, because it is the basis of all learning"

In 2006, Tardif proposed a new way of perusing this ever-evolving concept, defined by him as "a complex know-how based on the effective mobilization and combination of a variety of internal resources within a family of situations."

The table below presents a well-reasoned and rectified summary of the different models developed;

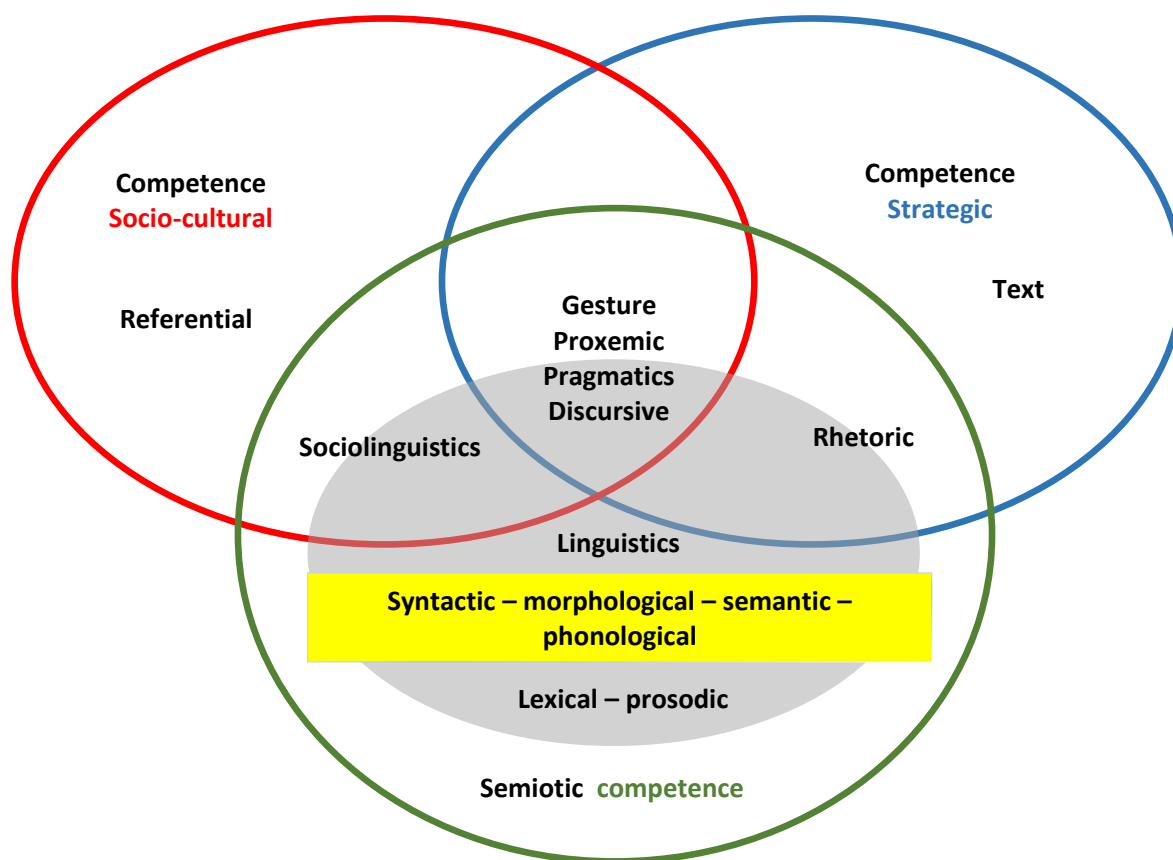


Figure 1. Synthesis of the different models of communicative competence

In short, there is no communicative competence as an individual concept, but rather as a group of dynamic elements in a mutually influencing and overlapping relationship.

3 The Importance of Language Proficiency Assessment

The progression and development of foreign language learners is part of the learner's entire school, university and even professional career. The teaching/learning of modern languages is based on three spreaders: positioning, training and assessment.

Assessment as an essential process for the regulation and validation of learning takes into account several challenges such as: the needs of learners, the diversity of learners' profiles and plurilingual repertoires. This leads teachers and actors in the field to vary the forms of assessment according to the progress in the educational path and the objectives set for the training.

The diagram below allows us to have a global and shared conception of what skills assessment is;

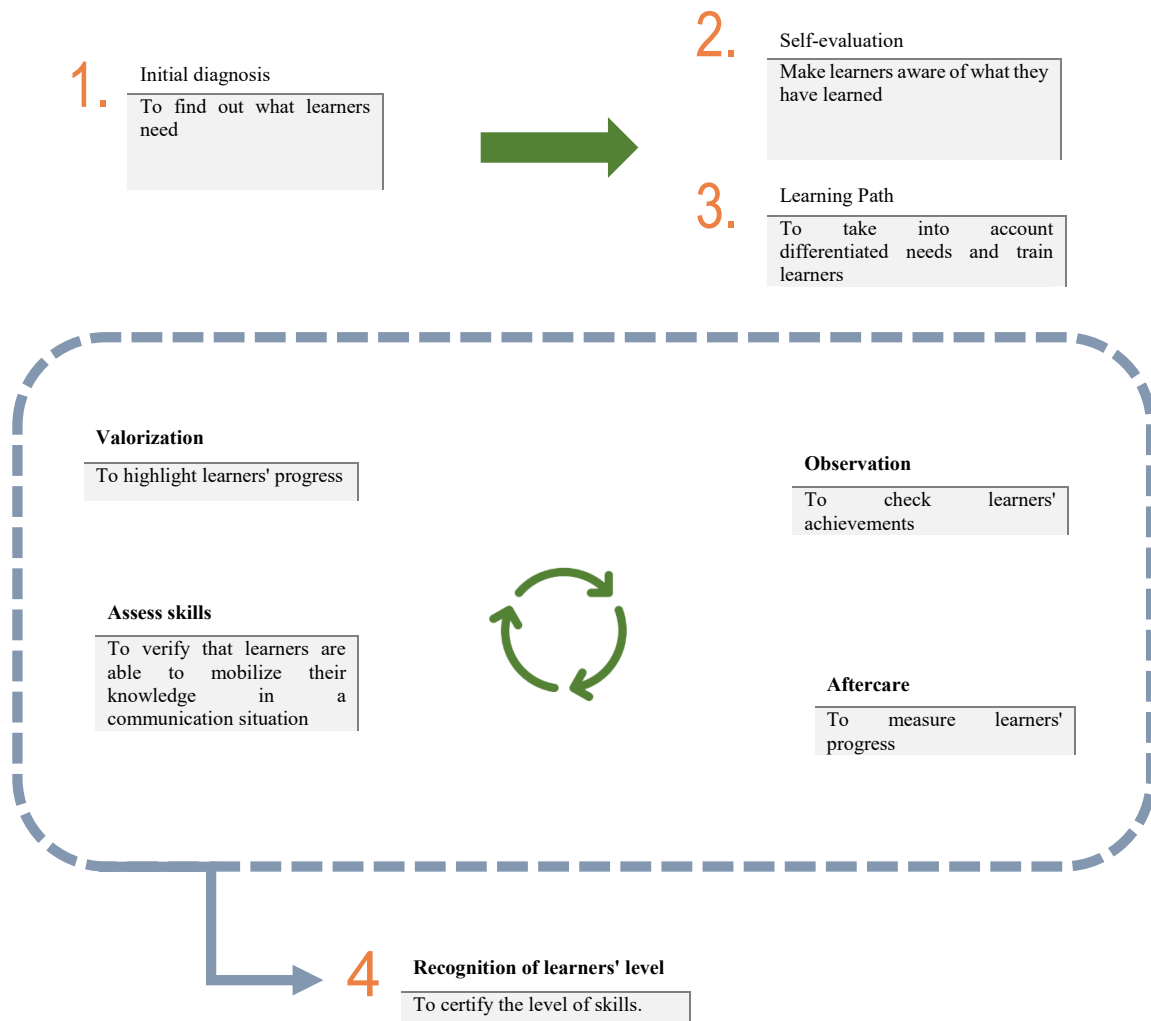


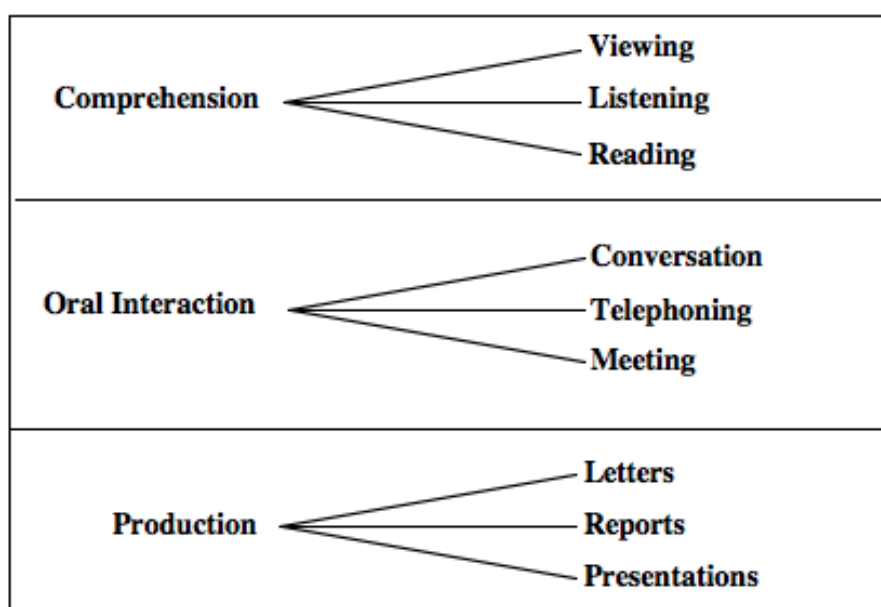
Figure 2. The components of learners' competency assessment, according to *EDUSCOL.education*

The assessment of language skills is of crucial importance in the field of education and training of learners, and more specifically of adults, since it makes it possible to measure language skills in an accurate and objective manner while taking into account the different components of the language. It also aims to find authenticity in assessments in order to implement a more relevant, valid, reliable and accurate assessment of language skills.

This assessment makes it possible to make a value judgement on the mastery of different language skills, such as listening and reading comprehension, oral interaction and written production.

According to work published in 1992 by Brian North of the English Speaking Union (ESU), who sees the practice of a language as "a set of domains of language activities rather than isolated skills". It groups the practice of a language into three essential language activities: Comprehension, Oral Interaction and Production.

Each activity is a general pole defined by language activities specific to each group, presented in the form of the following diagram;

Table 1. Language activities According to *Brian North of EiE*

It is essential to distinguish between competence and performance, as the assessment of these skills can sometimes be based on indirect measures, especially when assessing receptive skills such as listening and reading.

As we have already detailed in a previous section, language competence encompasses various aspects, ranging from linguistic aspects such as morphosyntax, spelling/phonology and vocabulary, to discursive, sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects. It is crucial to take these different elements into account for a comprehensive assessment of language skills.

Changing the conception and dismantling the tyrannical presence of ratings, adopting positive evaluation methods builds a crucial paradigm shift. This implies the implementation of a learning by error and therefore moving away from the sanction approach. The positive assessment focuses on the quality of the language, the clarity of the text, the richness of the vocabulary and other essential editorial aspects.

All in all, assessing language competence not only provides insight into the level of language proficiency of an individual or class group, but also urges continuous, constructive actional development of foreign language teaching/learning.

4 The Limitations of Traditional Evaluation Practices

Traditional evaluation methods have various limitations that can negatively influence the accuracy, objectivity and effectiveness of evaluations. Some of the key limitations identified in various research include:

- **Subjectivity and bias:** Traditional evaluations frequently rely on the personal views and biases of evaluators, which can lead to unfair and non-objective evaluations.
- **Lack of timelines:** Traditionally, evaluation methods follow an annual or semi-annual schedule, resulting in a lack of real-time information and monitoring, not taking into account performance and development needs over time.
- **Focus on the past:** Often, these practices place a high value on past performance, which neglects to take into account learners' developmental potential or their ability to adapt to new challenges. This can limit opportunities for continued progress.
- **Lack of learner involvement:** Traditional assessments can lead to a lack of learner engagement, which prevents constant monitoring of individual progress and identification of trends relevant to professional and personal progress.

In conclusion, these limitations underscore the need to move towards more agile and objective methods of competency assessment, incorporating continuous constructive feedback and fostering the active participation of learners for optimal educational and professional development and success.

In a world that is moving towards digital and technology, a traditional assessment will not and cannot meet societal expectations. The installation of innovative practices and new evaluation systems will be essential to overcome these limitations.

So, what innovative practices can be implemented in the assessment of language skills?

5 Innovative Practices in the Assessment of Language Skills

This article aims to define the new evaluative practices imposed by change, in an ever-changing world, we will examine in depth, the limitations and failures of the traditional evaluative system while highlighting the challenges of these innovative practices.

The assessment of language skills is the process by which language skills; discursive, textual – intertwined with each other during the production of the text or discourse – are measured, analysed and judged. It involves the assessment of an individual or group's ability to understand and produce oral and written speeches in a given language.

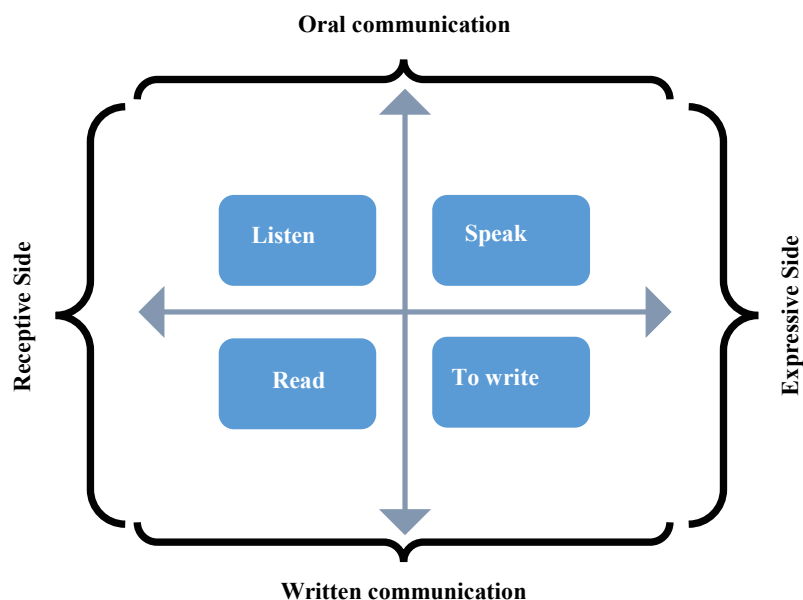


Figure 3. Language skills according to *Emmanuelle Soucy*

Integrating digital technology into the assessment of language skills involves using digital tools and devices to effectively and interactively assess 4 poles (oral comprehension – reading comprehension – oral interaction – written production). The growing importance of this integration is highlighted by the sources provided to improve the teaching and assessment of language skills. Benefits include the ability to teach and assess online, allowing for greater flexibility and accessibility for students.

In order to move forward and adapt methods to change, we will identify innovative practices and analyze different approaches and methods for assessing language skills across traditional boundaries, while highlighting the benefits and challenges of these practices.

We will collect data and concrete examples in order to provide valid answers to our problem.

6 Use of digital technologies for language assessment

Teaching/learning, a key sector of any progress, is following the giant steps traced by digital, artificial intelligence and technology. This progression and change is undoubtedly present in the teaching of foreign languages.

According to Roussel in 2020, "digital technology is recommended by official instructions to help learners acquire skills defined by the Common European Framework".

Studies on the use of digital technology in modern language teaching show that digital tools are widely used for listening and comprehension tasks.

Starting with the year 1986 in L'Homme where Dégremont identifies the language-related sectors that have led to significant advances in "information access techniques, linguistic corpora, speech recognition, machine translation in constant progress with deep learning, dictionary, terminology, office automation" (Martinez, 2021)

Many of these technologies have been integrated into everyday life through modern means of communication and information reception, such as mobile phones and digital tablets, and they have given rise to others. This integration, of course, is carried out within the framework of an action-oriented approach compatible with that of the CEFR (2001, 2018, 2021).

Nowadays, the use of digital technologies is not limited to transmission or teaching but to the assessment of learning and language skills, offering more precise and personalized experiences. With these tools, artificial intelligence and human evaluators can integrate seamlessly, speeding up the evaluation process while ensuring reliability and security. For example, the TOEIC Adaptive Listening and Reading Test offers a simplified and practical version that effectively measures candidates' language skills by adjusting the difficulty of the test according to CERCL levels.

In addition, digitalization in the field of education, such as at ETS GLOBAL, encourages educational research and the creation of high-quality language tests, supported by a serious research program.

Image 1. Representation of online teaching/learning. Image source: Shutterstock



In the context of the remote or hybrid classroom, assessment represents a great challenge. Traditional assessment approaches and methods are not necessarily suitable for teaching/learning outside of the classroom.

Laferrière and his collaborators in 2021 propose the following avenues:

- Evaluate on the basis of the learner's personal production (synthesis, analysis, mind map, open-ended and longer-developed questions, video reporting on what has been learned).

- Assess orally with or without visual support.
- Evaluate with random assignments of questions asked to each learner and taken from a bank of items.
- Implement self-assessments or assessments, automated or not, with reflective feedback on errors.

In order to offer a reliable remote assessment of language skills, several tools can be put into practice to facilitate the assessment process.

1. **Online assessment platforms:** Socrative is an online platform that allows learners to be asked pre-set or on-the-fly questions, such as quizzes, individual questions, etc. This platform allows the teacher to instantly record and grade the results as well as keep a library of old quizzes in their account.
2. **Speech recognition software:** These are software programs that allow you to evaluate pronunciation and fluency in the target language.
3. **Grammar correction software:** This tool analyzes written texts and provides corrections or suggestions for grammar, spelling, and style correction.
4. **Educational games:** There are several educational apps and games aimed at improving language skills.
5. **Video conferencing platforms:** Google Meet, Teams, Zoom, etc. and others are platforms that are used to conduct real-time assessments, where learners must interact with an assessor or teacher in the target language.

Remote assessment incentivizes teachers to implement one-on-one interviews as well. Using the multitude of digital tools available, they can provide personalized and targeted feedback. Let's take the example of a writing task where the commented reading of the first draft of a learner's text gives them suggestions adapted to their expectations and needs in order to encourage them to revise. The process can be complemented by individual meetings, such as discussing with the learner his or her successes and difficulties regarding the evaluation criteria.

According to some teachers, these meetings have great potential for learners, even if they may require a reorganization of the schedule and tasks.

Does digital technology, then, improve assessment by changing the way both learners and teachers discuss learning objectives, analyze data, and provide personalized feedback and proaction? The infographic below leads answers;

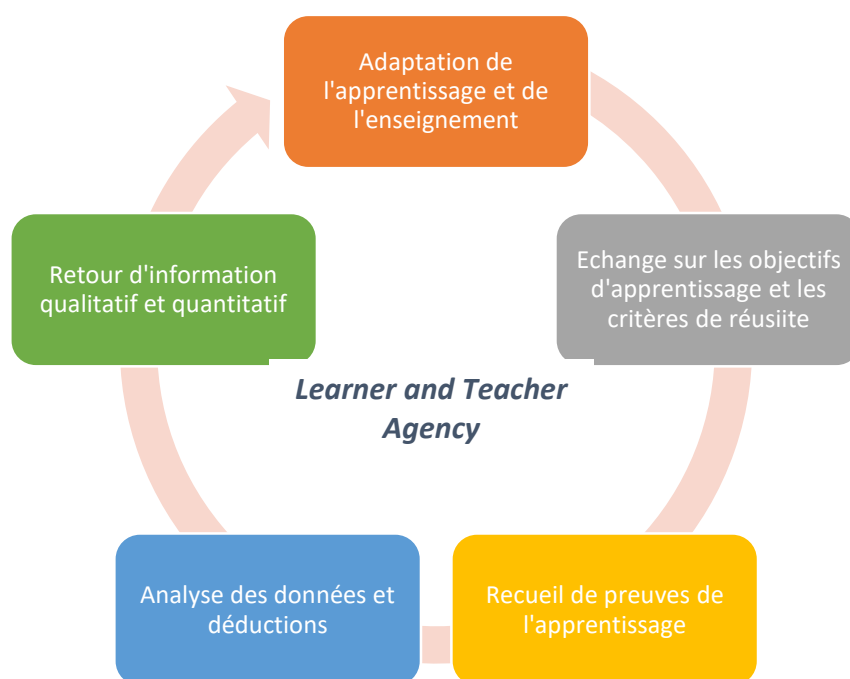


Figure 4. Formative Evaluation as Dialogue and Process. By Wendy Choi, 2020

Online formative assessment also has the power to personalize learning and assessment and minimize assessment bias. The use of digital technologies simplifies remote assessment. However, these instruments, like the pencil, offer as many possibilities for leaving imprints as for giving feedback to learners. It's all about taking advantage of the features of digital tools.

A teacher can ask their learners to create a digital assessment task focused on their strengths and interests by creating and disseminating the following:



In this sense, in order to meet learners' expectations and pedagogical needs, it is important to consider different evaluative tools. It is also essential to be aware of the increasing use of certain tools. Giving as an example the online evaluation forms, although fast, have limitations of authenticity and validity.

7 The benefits of using digital technologies for language assessment

Technological approaches promote more creative and active learning processes, stimulating learners' interaction and communication, since we integrate tools familiar to their daily lives into these learnings. This is essential to

make the learner an active social actor and to encourage him or her to learn the foreign language easily. Virtual learning environments created by technology offer more immersive interactions, complementing teachers' explanations and reinforcing language learning. Students can also develop critical thinking skills by analyzing information, comparing data, and understanding abstract concepts through digital tools.

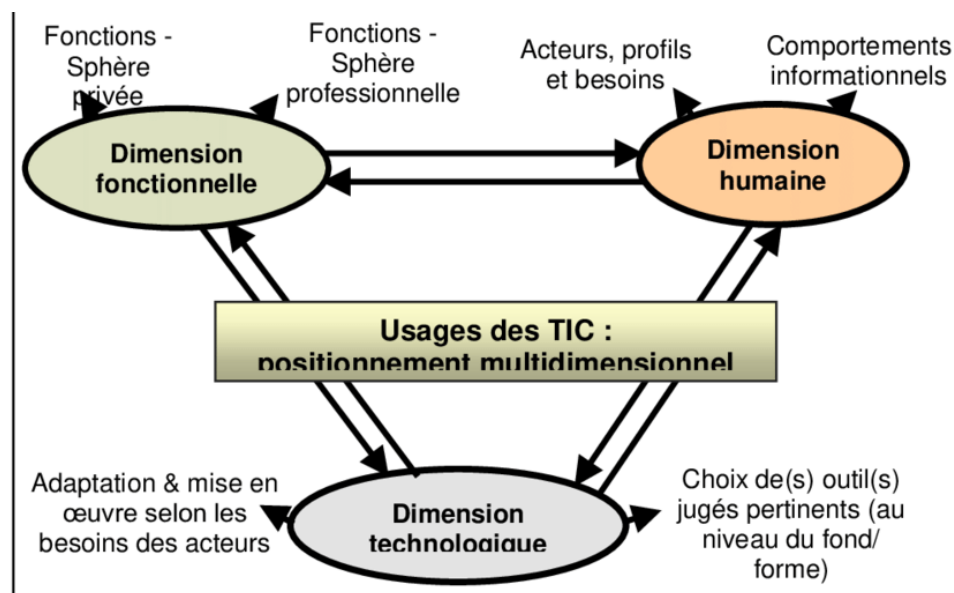


Figure 5. Multidimensional positioning of ICT uses

This approach can be described as hybrid. It takes into consideration the three factors that characterize organizations when they integrate, use, adopt and evolve ICTs: the "human" factor that determines the position of human actors, the "functional" factor that determines activities, and the "technological" factor that encompasses hardware and software tools. These dimensions are interrelated and cannot function without each other.

8 Conclusion

The assessment of language skills has evolved beyond traditional boundaries through the integration of innovative practices and digital technologies. By adopting creative and interactive approaches, educators can now deliver more personalized assessment experiences, promoting more effective and engaging learning for learners. The use of these tools not only makes it possible to measure language skills more accurately, but also stimulates the development of critical thinking and fosters a deeper immersion in language learning. By combining pedagogical expertise with technological advances, it is possible to push the boundaries of language assessment and open up new perspectives for language education in an ever-changing world.

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