REDESIGNING SUMMATIVE EVALUATION IN MEDICAL ENGLISH

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Abstract: Evaluation of discrete skills such as reading comprehension as well as vocabulary and grammar multiple choice testing are commonplace in Medical English examinations in higher education. But are these approaches to evaluation practically oriented enough so as to provide a clear image of what students can do with the language in a real life communicative context? This paper will present a case of project-based evaluation with students in English for Medical Cosmetics likely to meet such challenges.
Keywords: feedback, Medical English, project-based evaluation, summative evaluation

1. Introduction

In order to be relevant and meaningful, learning of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) should respond to the needs and challenges of the future profession. Different strategies such as needs analysis for course and materials design, but also teaching/learning methods that simulate future professional situations are employed to this end.

One particular way proposed herein towards achieving this goal in English for Medical Cosmetics is project-based learning (PBL) discussed below in further detail. Projects, through their degree of autonomy in learning and application in new situations of the specialized vocabulary, help students to communicate in situations likely to be encountered in their future profession.

More specifically, the current article describes PBL application to summative evaluation through the project: *The Beauty Salon* – "learning by doing" - featuring practical oral presentations by first year students in Medical Cosmetics.

The novelty of our approach rests in the employment of *The Beauty Salon* project as alternative assessment tool within the context of summative evaluation. We will highlight outcomes pertaining to speaking enhancement, confidence and satisfaction, as well as a more complex mix of types and roles of feedback in PB- versus classical examination.

1.1. Terminology employed in Project-based evaluation in Medical Cosmetics

1.1.1. Project-based learning

Learning organized around tasks is known as task-based learning and in its more complex form as project-based learning. Both strategies introduce real-life situations in order to involve the learner, starting from the idea that peer pressure works as a more powerful regulatory force than the teacher's requests (Habok and Nagy 2016).

A project, however, extends over a longer period of time and involves investigation, use and analysis of information, peer collaboration and communication, and a realistic end-product.

According to Thomas Markham (2011:39), "PBL integrates knowing and doing. Students acquire knowledge and elements of the core curriculum, but they also apply what they know to solve authentic problems and produce results that matter."

Students engaged in *The Beauty Salon* project had to research and read materials on different cosmetic techniques, adapt products to their partner/client (skin type, complexion, size), and make decisions on account of which they would perform the selected technique, while explaining to the client and to the participants what they were doing.

1.1.2 Summative versus formative evaluation and assessment

Formative evaluation is characterized by the administration of several tasks over a period of time and the provision of adequate feedback (Dudley-Evans and St. John 1998). In order to be formative, evaluation through testing should be continuous so that the feedback provided contributes to further enhancement of subsequent learning.

In large classes, however, administering tests continuously and providing adequate feedback is disruptive for the learning course as it reduces the activity time significantly, besides having limits in demonstrating what students can do with the language.

Moreover, multiple choice tests, which are favoured in the core medical education and included as evaluation standard in the curriculum for reasons of objectivity and uniformization, are unsuitable for the language learning evaluation when it comes to the productive oral comprehension abilities.

Summative evaluation consists of end-of-semester written exams (tests) and/or colloquiums (oral exams). Its purpose is to pass judgment and establish to what extent the educational standards have been met, this being reflected in the overall grade. The most common way of assessing performance in ESP is through written tests (Carrión and Chavarria 2012:257). Ideally, testing results should be used in order to improve future learning outcomes, but in summative testing they fail to perform this role, especially in our case, when students no longer study that subject. Consequently, the teacher's role in written summative evaluation is limited: the feedback he/she provides fails to reflect back on the student's learning as it occurs too late in the learning process.

Assessment. If summative evaluation determines the extent to which objectives are achieved, assessment provides feedback on performance and areas of improvement (Renard 2017). That is why assessment, the "process of gathering information about students" (Hart 1994:1) and how they are doing, or providing adequate feedback rather than evaluation represents the gold standard of learning.

In *alternative assessment* "students are tested as they actually perform the behaviour itself" (Brown 2004:405). Tasks are "consistent with course goals and curriculum and students and teachers are likely to be more motivated to perform them, as opposed to a set of multiple choice questions" (Brown 2004:255). Alternative assessment "asks students to show what they can do" (Hart 1994; Coombe et al. 2007) and this includes projects in which students accomplish a final product, in our case performance of a cosmetic procedure (Van den Bergh et al. 2006). Huerta-Macías (as cited in Coombe et al. 2007:44) claimed that in this type of assessment, "students are evaluated on what they integrate and produce rather than on what they are able to recall and reproduce."

1.1.3 The power of feedback

Feedback is a valuable part of formative and alternative assessment in ESP. The value of feedback for teachers was underlined by Bill Gates in his TedTalk: "We improve through Feedback". In an oral exam, when students extract a subject, they generally speak to the teacher who is also the assessor and their feedback is performance-based rather than content- and communication-based as it happens in real life exchanges.

In our PB evaluation, at least two types of feedback were collected, which offers a more complete picture of what students are able to do with the language:
a) formal feedback: from teacher to student (T to S), focusing on language,
b) peer, communicative (informal) feedback from students to the performing student (Ss to S), focusing on content.

2. Project-based evaluation in English for Medical Cosmetics

2.1. Context

The participants in this class-based action research are 38 (N=38) first year students who pursue a degree in Medical Cosmetics, a three-year undergraduate programme of medical studies, unique in Romania, run by the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Târgu Mures. English is a 2 hour/week curriculum subject for the first and second semester (i.e. a total of 56 hours) and students sit an end-of-semester exam (written test in the first and oral colloquium in the second). The large number of students in the group, as well as their mixed abilities (A2-B2) poses serious challenges for the teaching and assessment approaches.

The syllabus was designed according to a needs analysis of the linguistic and communicative competences future specialists in the field of cosmetology and technology of the cosmetic product need, and included:
-   socializing,
-   reading product information,
-   explaining cosmetic procedures and techniques,
-   informing and advising clients on cosmetic treatments,
-   involving clients in decision-making,
-   advertising products and explaining cosmetic ingredients,
-   communicating at international fairs.

The coursebook was conceived so as to meet these basic needs (Pop 2017) and to help future employees to communicate in the field of medical cosmetics. It includes units on: parts of the human body, hygiene, healthy eating, cosmetic products and procedures, the skin, eyes, lips and face, medicinal plants and alternative cosmetics, product presentation. Besides vocabulary and grammar practice, activities during the semester envisaged stimulation of speaking as the most important productive skill, but also of reading and the receptive skills (listening and understanding) (Berariu and Zdrenghea 2009).

Site. Students were offered the chance to practise autonomously and improve their performance through level-customized grammar and vocabulary exercises on the Cosmetology site https://sites.google.com/site/cosmetologyumftgm/.

The two evaluation components stipulated in the syllabus are: continuous assessment and evaluation, i.e. class performance during the semester (solving different speaking, writing, and reading tasks), and summative evaluation (written and oral) at the end of first and second semester, respectively.

Although the results of the first semester summative evaluation (written) were good, students had difficulty in oral communication. This is explained through the fact that the summative written test evaluated the students' linguistic rather than communicative competence, failing to fully describe what students can do with the language in a real context. Linguistic competence, i.e. grammar, syntax, vocabulary, is just a part of the communicative competence since it does not have any sociolinguistic context (e.g. how to express a specific attitude such as courtesy, authority, friendliness, respect), nor does it take into consideration pragmatics (e.g. client's age, social status, persuasion) or the relational strategies with a client such as rapport, voice quality, breaks, repetition, and body language.

The purpose of *The Beauty Salon* project was, therefore, to integrate productive and receptive language skills, meaningful language use (speaking, vocabulary, content) and purposeful communication (work, communication, research, summarizing) (Beckett and Slater 2005).

2.2. Hypotheses

H_1: Alternative project-based evaluation is relevant for the receptive and productive skills, offering a more accurate picture of what students can do with the language in real professional situations and it is likely to enhance the students' attitude and confidence.

H_2: Unlike paper-based testing, project-based summative evaluation can make an impact on students' learning and outcomes through just-in-time peer and teacher feedback.

2.3. The Beauty Salon - Project development and results

The students were divided into 19 pairs at the beginning of the second semester and were either assigned a project or they selected a project topic of their own choice. The assessment format was that of a real-life beauty salon with half of the students playing the role of beautician and the other half the role of clients. In turn, each pair made an oral presentation while performing the cosmetic procedure.

Role 1: The beautician had to find out details about the client, cosmetic products, explain to the client/s (rather than the teacher) what she was doing, the products she was using, advantages and reasons for their choices, the importance of different stages of the procedure while advising the client about future course of treatment, finally checking/validating information through peer feedback.

Role 2: The client - answers the beautician's questions, negotiates the cosmetic plan/procedure or agrees with the proposed course of treatment, asks different questions about: product quality and components, timing, future conduct.

For product presentation, the project involved the use of realia that were either brand products (blushers, eyeshadows, mascaras) or products prepared by students according to bio recipes (e.g. home-made masks).

The following procedures were presented and performed: facial masks, facial makeup, eye makeup, body painting, hand care (Fig. 1, 2).

| Fig.1 Facial | Fig.2 Eye makeup |

Students gave their consent to having their pictures published for research purposes.

If performance of certain procedures such as the body painting were unique, facials and makeups offered students the chance to compare and contrast their own treatment with their peers', important content-based feedback coming from peers as specialists in the field.

Pairs met several times during the semester to prepare the project and the Q/A sessions were established monthly to check on project development and clarifications. Students synthesized information from many sources - translations, authentic materials - and presented the procedure naturally and convincingly, while answering queries from the audience.

2.3.1 Evaluation

Evaluation and grading was made with a four-level rubric:
a) meets expectations of the assigned role to a high extent (9-10),
b) meets expectations to a lower extent (7-8),
c) slightly underperforms (5-6),
d) does not meet expectations of PBE(project based evaluation)/fails (4).
The descriptors were:
1. Language: pronunciation, specific and varied vocabulary, accuracy (grammar, tenses, agreement, word order),
2. Communication: ability to spontaneously exchange information versus memorized dialogues, interaction with the audience, ability to answer impromptu questions, fluency (pauses, hesitation, self corrections, restructuring sentences vs natural flow),
3. Pragmatic competence: adaptation to client, persuasion,
4. Relational strategies: rapport, body language, voice quality, breaks.

2.3.2 Feedback collected in PBE

Formal feedback (T to S) – was just-in-time and explained to the students the degree and the quality of task completion with reference to the descriptors above. The role of this feedback was to draw the students' attention to areas where they still needed to improve in terms of lingustic and communicative competence through lifelong learning.

Informal feedback from peers (Ss to S). Students are usually passive when it comes to peer-evaluation and are not always prepared to offer reliable feedback in terms of language and communication. However, they can be excellent judges of content, especially in the attractive field of cosmetics. Moreover, the project learning and development phase had made students specialists in the field, a dignified position, which enhanced their attitude and confidence during the presentation and decreased anxiety involved in regular examinations.

That is why peer feedback focused on content, thus complementing the teacher's linguistic and communicative feedback. Actual performance of cosmetic procedures transposed the students into the realities of a beauty salon with questions addressed from the audience, which underpins the learning and communicative aspect of the project assessment: What kind of mask did you use? What make is the primer/concealer that you used? Why did you choose this particular brand and not another? Does it contain parabens?

Overall, peer feedback was mostly positive and its role was to contribute to creating a relaxed atmosphere, students being proud of their accomplished product.

2.3.2.1 Quantitative and qualitative outcomes

The 19 presentations increased the total speaking time (TSP) by 380 minutes (10 min/presentation + 10 min of teacher and student feedback), i.e. about 6 ½ hours, which means an equal amount of time spent in an English-speaking medium while listening and interacting meaningfully.

The students' feedback about the project results was obtained through a non-structured oral interview which measured their satisfaction with project-based examination: Are you satisfied with the Beauty Salon project? Explain. How did you feel when speaking during the project? How would you describe this experience in one sentence?

Most students agreed that PBE was a more complex and preferred type of evaluation versus the written test. Their responses to the interview were classified as:
   a) Preparation and rehearsing contributed to a lower level of examination anxiety = students could give a better performance,
   b) It was better to speak to colleagues than to the teacher = students were more autonomous,
   c) Good and relaxed atmosphere, enthusiasm = enhanced attitude,
   d) The content was relevant and interesting = students remembered better and were more motivated,
   e) Students created a cosmetic product/procedure = this contributed to a sense of ownership and pride.
Challenges for PB-speaking evaluation were related to timing and task complexity:
   - the examination took much longer – students presented in two weekly sessions.
   - performing and at the same time explaining was a more difficult task.

3. Conclusion

The general purpose of the *Beauty Salon* project was to bring ESP learners closer to communicative situations they are likely to meet in their future careers, while improving their collaboration and professional communication in English throughout the semester.

It explored the benefits of project-based summative evaluation as class action research meant to extend the evaluation process one step forward into learning by capitalizing on peer and teacher feedback, with significant outcomes:
   - extension of student talking time by 6 hours and 30 minutes, which means an equal amount of time spent in an English-speaking medium, listening and interacting meaningfully;

- more authentic speaking - students spoke in front of an audience, real procedures were employed and realia was used;
- students as content specialists offered just-in-time peer feedback, complementary to teacher feedback, the latter focussing on linguistic and communicative aspects. Joint feedback significantly reduced examination anxiety, increased student confidence in their own speaking, attitude and pride that come from product creation/performance and ownership.

To conclude, besides being a complex and relevant summative examination that relfects more faithfully what students can do with the language, project-based evaluation has great potential of livening up examinations through multiple teacher and peer feedback, continuous autonomous learning, as well as extended and improved performance, attitude and satisfaction.

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