

# A Xhosa communicative test for senior L2 pupils\*

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The writer shows to what extent the aims of the Xhosa syllabus for the Senior Certificate examination (Higher and Standard Grade) under the Cape Education Department are met by constructing and administering an oral proficiency test in Xhosa. The writer takes into account the two main objectives of the syllabus: to use the communication means in every day situations and to develop the listening and speaking skills of the pupils. The emphasis of the test items is not on linguistic accuracy but on the pupil's ability to function effectively through language in particular settings and contexts. The validity, reliability and practicability of the test are discussed as well as the trial test and the administration.

Die skrywer wys in watter mate die doelstellings van die Xhosaleerplan vir die Senior Sertifikaat-eksamen (Hoër en Standaard Graad) van die Kaapse Onderwysdepartement bereik word deur die samestelling en toepassing van 'n vaardigheidstoets in mondelinge werk. Die skrywer neem die twee hoofdoelstellings van die leerplan in ag, nl. om die bedreweheid om te kommunikeer in alledaagse situasies te gebruik en die luister- en mondelinge vermoë van die leerlinge te ontwikkel. Die klem van die toetsitems val nie op taalkundige akkuraatheid nie, maar op die vermoë van die leerlinge om in spesifieke situasies en omstandighede doeltreffend te kommunikeer. Die geldigheid, betroubaarheid en uitvoerbaarheid van die toets word bespreek asook die voorlopige toets en die administrasie daarvan.

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## 1.1 Introduction

Effective communication between different racial and language groups depends on people's proficiency in the language or languages used as a means of communication.

Effective communication is especially necessary when one looks at the multilingual nature of South Africa. According to the 1980 census, although English and Afrikaans are the official languages, 24 languages are spoken in the country (*The Star* 27.7.1985:12). Of the African languages, Zulu is the most widely spoken, followed by Xhosa and the Sotho languages.

The heterogeneous nature of the country means that children learn more than one language at school. The national education policy and provincial educational ordinances stipulate that pupils attending schools which fall under provincial departments of education should be taught either in English or Afrikaans. In most instances, the language of instruction is taught as a mother tongue or first language (L1). The other official language (Afrikaans or English) is compulsory and is taught as a second language (L2). (Pupils capable of doing so, may take the other official language as a first language.)

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There are situations in South Africa when an additional language, officially referred to as a third language (L3), is needed for communication purposes within a specific language group. At present German, Dutch, French and other modern European languages, African languages, as well as classical languages such as Latin and Greek, are taught.

In each province, the African language predominantly spoken by blacks in that region has been included as an additional language in the primary school curriculum. It is an elective subject in the secondary school up to Senior Certificate level.

Great progress has been made in promoting the teaching of African languages, to such an extent that syllabuses for a number of these languages have been devised, for example, in Pedi, Tswana, Zulu and Xhosa (Human Sciences Working Committee Report on Languages and Language Teaching 1981). Xhosa was first introduced as a Senior Certificate subject in white secondary schools in the Cape Province in 1966 (Endley 1983:1).

The term, third language (L3), is used by education departments to facilitate the choice of school subjects. It does not denote the order in which languages are learnt. White pupils who learn an African language take it as an additional language, or a third language. In this study, the teaching/learning of Xhosa will mean that it is done technically as a second language but as a third language within the definition of the provincial departments of education. The terms may also be used interchangeably for the learning of Xhosa.

The approach to language teaching has been revitalised by:

- different theories concerning the nature of language
- new theories concerning the control process of language acquisition
- innovative proposals for syllabus development and the design of instructional systems as well as
- the use of a variety of novel practices, techniques and procedures in the language classroom (Richards 1972:21).

The Xhosa language did not escape this revitalisation process. A break was made from the structurally orientated syllabus (which had been in existence since 1975), resulting in the adoption of a communicative syllabus in 1982 at schools under the Cape Department of Education.

## **1.2 Aim of the study**

The study attempts to suggest an alternative approach in testing oral proficiency in Xhosa, related to the objectives of the syllabus for Senior Certificate:

- to use the communication means in everyday situations
- to develop the listening and speaking skills of the pupils in respect of various everyday themes (and their vocabulary) that occur in specific situations (1982:63).

An alternative Xhosa test which sets out to measure effectively the attainment of the above-mentioned objectives of the Departmental syllabus was constructed and administered.

## **2.1 Communicative language testing**

The term test is applied to a measure (taken under specified conditions and within a specified time-limit) of knowledge and ability designed to yield information for a specific purpose, and intended to be applied to a specific group of people in such a way that the performance of a particular individual may be compared fairly with that of others in the group (Brumfit and Roberts 1983:122). To date it seems that no attempt has been made to construct a Xhosa language test at Senior Certificate level which may be used by teachers under the Cape Department of Education. It appears that teachers of Xhosa tend to devise their own classroom tests which are generally prepared, administered and scored by one teacher.

In this study an attempt to apply the theory of communicative language testing is discussed. In the discussion the following steps in the process of constructing a Xhosa test, appropriate for the communicative Xhosa syllabus, will be explained:

- planning the test
- preparing the test items and directions
- submitting the test to review and revising on the basis of review
- pretesting the material and analysing the results
- assembling the final form of the test
- reproducing the test and
- test constraints.

Teachers frequently ask how to test communicatively. Porter (1983:199) points out that the proposals for communicative testing (at this stage) contribute only a set of hypotheses which need empirical validation. It is obvious that further research is required, especially for testing in general courses.

## **2.2 Xhosa oral achievement**

In devising an educational test of oral achievement in Xhosa at Senior Certificate level under the Cape Department of Education, research procedure included interviews with:

- officials of the Cape Department of Education concerned with the teaching of languages
- practising teachers in Xhosa under the Cape Department of Education and
- language testing researchers.

The literature study that was done and information gained from the interviews were analysed and the information was used in developing the test.

The Director of the Cape Department of Education granted permission for research to be conducted in schools under his jurisdiction. Schools which offered Xhosa at Senior Certificate level were used. Necessary arrangements were made beforehand and the specific schools were notified ahead of time. The language testing research focused on the learner's oral performance in Xhosa. The premise was that to know a language is primarily/mainly to display a competence in using its skills (Spolsky 1978). In this test, items were developed in such a manner that the testee would be able to display his proficiency in manipulating oral skills.

Since this test assesses what has been achieved or learnt from what was taught in a particular course or a series of courses it is by definition an achievement test (Cohen 1980:9). The type of the syllabus on which the test is based is communicative. Consequently, the test is a communicative/functional test. The term 'functional' was selected because functions, notions and situations were to be used as test items. In addition, the principles of testing were to be drawn from the notional-functional teaching approach. As has been discussed by Farhady (1983), the theory behind the notional-functional approach evolves from the anticipated communicative needs of the learner. The approach attempts to identify and teach the language activities that the learner is most likely to be faced with in real-life situations. In other words, the notional-functional approach shifts the instruction focus from the linguistic to the communicative needs of the learner.

The identification and classification of language functions can never be exhausted. One may also agree with Wilkins (1976) and Widdowson (1979) that the numerous functions to be tested may cause problems similar to those of discrete-point tests. However, regarding these problems, Farhady (1983:258) explains that there is an extremely important difference between the two types of seemingly similar problems. In the functional test, any single item involves an independent

communicative behaviour regardless of the number and type of linguistic rules. No matter what the function, there is no need to investigate whether it does (or how much it does) contribute to the process of communication. This is not true with discrete-point test items because they involve discrete items with no specific reference to the actual or potential use of those items in real communication. A testing approach which is intended to follow the notional-functional approach should therefore include items which focus on assessing the testees' ability to handle the communicative functions of language, rather than their ability to use linguistic forms only. This does not imply that the linguistic accuracy of a sentence is de-emphasised. On the contrary, it is considered as important as any other component of behaviour.

As to the nature of the functional test, one may agree with Wilkins (1976) that it should basically involve integrated rather than isolated skills. Wilkins points out that a functional test should seek answers to such questions as the examinee's ability to perform certain functions in appropriate social environments. In developing a functional test, then, selection of the functions is of crucial importance.

## **2.3 Guidelines for constructing the test**

### **2.3.1 Planning the test**

The test had to be an integrated one in order to be functional. This meant that language in a test could not be regarded as a set of unrelated items. The items had to be integrated and tested in combination with one another.

Another implication of the above statement was that language learning is purposeful. The purpose had to be always communicative and what was to be tested was communicative ability and not formal knowledge.

Another guideline was the aspect of communicative language proficiency, which is an important aspect in communication. In this type of proficiency the focus is on eliciting social and interpersonal uses of language through spoken channels. Communication is regarded primarily as a form of social interaction in which emphasis is normally placed less on grammatical forms and literal meaning and more on the participants and their purpose in using language i.e. on the social meaning of utterances, for instance, explaining, expressing opinions and enquiring.

Authenticity was also important. This meant that testing undertaken had to be real-life interactive communicative operations. The test had to simulate real situations in order to provide a better understanding of what the ultimate tasks in language performance would be, so the test items had to be in a meaningful context. Although real contexts are illusory in a pedagogical setting, the examiner attempted to maintain a realistic setting when conducting the test.

The test had to have content validity. Content validity refers to the ability of a test to measure what has been taught and subsequently learnt by students. Language material used in the test was selected for its high frequency of use.

The test had to be valid, a test of what it claimed to test, Xhosa oral proficiency and not memory or interest for instance. It also had to be reliable, constructed in such a way as to yield consistent results. The test had to be practical as far as administration and scoring were concerned.

This test had to possess the characteristics of a communicative test. It had to assess language used for a purpose beyond itself. It had to relate to communicative circumstances and not merely create an opportunity for the learner to display his language so that it could be assessed. It also had to be conducted in such a way that an information gap was bridged between tester and pupil. It had to propose a language-using purpose which could be fulfilled by the communicative skill the learner had so far acquired.

The test was direct. It was conducted while the examiner faced the pupil and both were engaged in communicative dialogue.

### 2.3.2 Preparing the test items and directions

Test items used in the communicative test were selected from the Xhosa syllabus by means of frequency counts. The Xhosa syllabus prescribed by the Cape Department of Education consists of a comprehensive list of situations, functions and notions (See The Education Gazette 1982:67; 71-72; 76-77).

When one looks at the functions and notions prescribed in the syllabus, the problem which confronts one is appropriate selection. This problem was however solved by referring to an unpublished research study (Du Plessis 1982) conducted by the Department of African Languages at the University of Stellenbosch. In this study, an analysis was made of functions and notions prescribed for the Senior Certificate. The rate of frequency of the functions and notions was tested by means of a specific communicative text. This resulted in the following functions and notions:

FUNCTIONS		
Very high frequency	High frequency	Very low frequency
Agreeing – <i>Ukuvumelana</i>	Asking – <i>Ukubuza</i>	Advising – <i>Ukucebisa</i>
Certain – <i>Ukuqinisekisa</i>	Describing – <i>Ukuchaza</i>	
Satisfaction – <i>Ukonela</i>	Denying – <i>Ukulandula</i>	
Disappointment – <i>Udano</i>		
Warning – <i>Isiyalo</i>		
Wishing – <i>Iminqweno</i>		

  

NOTIONS	
Length of time – <i>Ubude bexesha</i>	Speed – <i>Isantya</i>
Frequency – <i>Ukuphindaphinda</i>	Change – <i>Inguqulelo</i>
Quantity – <i>Ubuninzi</i>	Moisture – <i>Ubumanzi</i>
Reflection – <i>Ukucinga</i>	Contrast – <i>Ukwahlukisa</i>
Temporary – <i>Okwexeshana</i>	
Material – <i>Umchako</i>	
Inclusion – <i>Ubandakanyo</i>	

When selecting functions and notions to be used as test items, all those with a very high frequency were automatically selected. The rest were drawn from the other two categories of functions (high frequency and very low frequency of use). The following functions and notions were selected as test items in constructing the test under discussion.

Functions	Notions
Denying – <i>Ukulandula</i>	Length of time – <i>Ubude bexesha</i>
Certain – <i>Ukuqinisekisa</i>	Frequency – <i>Ukuphindaphinda</i>
Satisfaction – <i>Ukonela</i>	Quantity – <i>Ubuninzi</i>
Disappointment – <i>Udano</i>	Reflection – <i>Ukucinga</i>
Warning – <i>Isiyalo</i>	Speed – <i>Isantya</i>
Describing – <i>Ukuchaza</i>	Contrast – <i>Ukwahlukisa</i>
Agreement – <i>Ukuvumelana</i>	Temporary – <i>Okwexeshana</i>
Change – <i>Inguqulelo</i>	

Three topics were chosen at random. These were sport, South Africa and newspapers.

### **2.3.3 Submitting the test to review and pretesting**

A provisional test was constructed based on the guidelines discussed and comprising selected functions, notions and situations. Once the researcher was satisfied with his material, he submitted it to consultants. Changes were made to items based on the comments received.

The materials were then pretested. The items were tried out on two schools, with 7 pupils per school. This was administered to a number of pupils of the same kind as those for whom the test was being designed. Only those items which proved statistically satisfactory in the pretest were included in the final version of the test. Inclusion was determined by their suitable level of difficulty – neither too difficult nor too easy for the pupils being tested. Second, inclusion was determined by the items' ability to discriminate between those pupils who knew the material or had the skills or abilities being tested, and those who did not. The two schools, one Afrikaans medium and one English medium, were selected for three practical considerations: proximity, size and language medium. The test was conducted at Senior Certificate level. The trial test was administered individually to fourteen pupils. It was estimated that the testing period per pupil would be fifteen minutes but it proved to be twenty-five minutes. The order of the subtests was constant. All the tests were administered by the researcher.

In order to maximise uniformity and co-operation, the researcher explained to the testees why the test was being given and read a specific set of instructions. These were given in either English or Afrikaans, depending upon the first language of the pupil. (Only the English version is given in this article.)

For each section, the researcher read the stimulus sentence or question. A sentence or question was repeated if necessary.

The testees sat facing the tester at a table on which was placed a tape recorder. The pupil's response was recorded on tape and part of the assessment was made by the examiner at a later stage.

The trial test was subdivided into four sections:

- listening comprehension test
- understanding of selected functions within contexts
- understanding of selected notions in various contexts
- unstructured conversation based on specific situations.

#### **SECTION A**

The examiner attempted to put the pupil at ease. He took the initiative and greeted the pupil. He asked a few questions in English or Afrikaans, e.g. name, address, home language and any further questions deemed necessary in order to build up the pupil's confidence so that he would respond naturally and unaffectedly. No assessment was made at this stage.

#### **SECTION B (Listening comprehension test)**

##### **Instruction to the pupil**

I shall read you some sentences to which you must respond by doing something physical, or by agreeing or disagreeing, i.e. by saying "yes" or "no".

For example, if I say, "Jonga efestileni", you should respond by looking at the window. If I say, "Iyunivesithi zininzi kule dolophu", you should say, "Hayi", because this is not true.

If I ask you, "Uyazibona na ezi ncwadi phezu kwetafle?", you should respond by saying, "Ewe", if you see books on the table.

**I shall start now**

- 1 **Command** *Vala amehlo.* (Close your eyes.)
- 2 **Question** *Le glasi iphezu kwetafile izele na ngamanzi?*  
(Is the glass on the table full of water?)
- 3 **Statement** *Kufundisa amaxhego odwa kwesi sikolo.*  
(Only grandfathers teach at this school.)
- 4 **Statement** *Inqununu yesi sikolo ngumfazi/yindoda.*  
(The principal at this school is a woman/man.)
- 5 **Command** *Susa iphephandaba esitulweni, libeke etafileni.*  
(Remove the newspaper from the chair, put it on the table.)
- 6 **Question** *Ndinxibe ihempe emnyama neqhina elibomvu?*  
(Am I wearing a black shirt and a red tie?)
- 7 **Statement** *Namhlanje imvula iyanetha kuyabanda.*  
(Today it is raining; it is cold.)
- 8 **Command** *Thabatha usiba oluluhlaza ubhale ephepheni igama, ifani, nebanga okulo.*  
(Take a blue pen and write your name, surname and the standard you are in on the paper.)
- 9 **Question** *Yinyaniso le nto yokuba uhamba isikolo ukususela ngoMvulo kude kube yiCawa?*  
(Is it true that you attend school from Monday to Sunday?)
- 10 **Question** *Ezi ncwadi ziphezu kwetafile zibhalwe ngumntu omnye?*  
(Have the books on the table been written by one person?)
- 11 **Statement:** *Kushushu kakhulu namhlanje abantu baza kudada emanzini.*  
(It is very hot today and the people are going to swim in the pool.)
- 12 **Command** *Phakama uqokelele zonke iincwadi, wakugqiba zifake ebhokisini.*  
(Stand up and put all the books into a pile; when you have finished put them in the box.)

(Commands: 4 Questions: 4 Statements: 4)

**SECTION C SERIES A (Functions)**

**Instruction to the pupil**

I am going to ask you a few questions and you must answer me in Xhosa each time.

For example, I may ask “Uyathemba ukuba umhlobo wakho uza kufika?” (Do you hope your friend will arrive?) You may answer “Ewe (ndiyathemba)”, if you hope that your friend will arrive.

**I shall start now**

- 1 **Ukuvumelana** *Uyahambisana nale nto yokubethwa kwabafundi esikolweni?*  
(Agreement) (Do you agree that children should be beaten at school?)
- 2 **Ukuqinisekisa** *Yinyaniso le nto yokuba umdlalo weqakamba udlalwa ehlotyeni?*  
(Ascertaining) (Is it true that cricket is played in summer?)
- 3 **Ukwanela** *Xa wanele kukusebenza ekhaya wenza ntoni?*  
(Satisfaction) (What do you do, when you have finished your home duties?)
- 4 **Udano** *Udaniswe yintoni kwimidlalo yesikolo/yombhoxo yehoki?*  
(Disappointment) (What has disappointed you in rugby/hockey?)
- 5 **Isiyalelo** *Abantu abanxiba impahla eshushu ebusika balumkele ntoni?*  
(Warning) (What are people who wear warm clothes in winter afraid of?)

- 6 **Ukuchaza** *Ufunda eziphi izifundo kwesi sikolo?*  
(Describing) (Which subjects do you learn in this school?)
- 7 **Ukuvumelana** *Wena ufunda kwibanga leshumi kulo nyaka, uyavuma?*  
(Agreement) (You are in standard ten this year. Do you agree?)
- 8 **Ukuqinisekisa** *Uqiniseka ngantoni eluviweni ukuphela konyaka?*  
(Ascertaining) (What are you sure of in the exams at the end of the year?)
- 9 **Udano** *Uva into embi yintoni namhlanje?*  
(Disappointment) (What makes you feel bad today?)
- 10 **Isiyalelo** *Xa uza kuphatha imali eninzi ulumkela ntoni?*  
(Warning) (What are you careful of when you carry a lot of money?)
- 11 **Ukuvumelana** *Uyavumelana nam ukuba esi sikolo sinabafundi abambalwa?*  
(Agreement) (Do you agree with me that this school has few pupils?)
- 12 **Ukwanela** *Wanela yintoni ngexesha leKrisimesi?*  
(Satisfaction) (What do you like most about Christmas?)

## SECTION C SERIES B (Notions)

### Instruction to the pupil

I am again going to ask you a few questions and you must answer me in Xhosa.

For example, I may ask: “Nizifunda nini izifundo zesiNgesi?” (When do you study English?)

Your answer may be, “Yonke imihla.” (Every day.)

I will read each question twice and you must respond immediately.

### I shall start now

- 1 **Ubude bexesha** *Uya iintsuku ezingaphi esikolweni ngeveki?*  
(Length of time) (How many days a week do you go to school?)
- 2 **Ukuphindaphinda** *Wakha waya eMelika?*  
(Frequency) (Have you been to America?)
- 3 **Ubuninzi** *Maninzi kakhulu amaNdiya eFreyistata?*  
(Quantity) (Are there many Indians in the Free State?)
- 4 **Ukucinga** *Ucinga ukuba sesiphi esona sifundo sibalulekileyo esikolweni?*  
(Reflection) (Which do you think is the most important subject at school?)
- 5 **Isantya** *Imoto zimele ukuhamba ngesiphi isantya phakathi edolophini?*  
(Speed) (At what speed are cars supposed to travel in town?)
- 6 **Ukwahlula** *Iintyatyambo zasehlotyeni ziyafana nezasebusika?*  
(Contrast) (Are summer flowers the same as winter flowers?)
- 7 **Ubuninzi** *Ifunyanwa phi igolide eninzi eMzantsi Afrika?*  
(Quantity) (Where is most gold found in South Africa?)
- 8 **Ukuphindaphinda** *Xa udibana nomhlobo wakho nisoloko nincokola ngezifundo?*  
(Frequency) (When you meet your friend, do you always talk about school subjects?)
- 9 **Ubude bexesha** *Kwenzeka ntoni wakufika emva kwexesha eklasini?*  
(Length of time) (What happens when you arrive late for class?)
- 10 **Okwexeshana** *Umfundi ofuna ukuba ngugqirha, ufunda ixesha elingakanani eyunivesithi?*  
(Temporary) (How long does a student who wants to become a doctor study?)

- 11 **Inguqulelo** (Change) *(1) Guqulela esi sivakalisi esiNgesini:*  
(Translate this phrase into English: “(1) Imithi (1) emide (1) yepayini.”  
Long trees of pine)
- 12 **Ubuninzi** (Quantity) *Bonke abafundi kwesi sikolo bafunda isiXhosa?*  
(Do all the pupils in this school learn Xhosa?)

## SECTION D

### Instruction to the pupil

I shall give you three topics.

You must choose one to discuss.

These are the topics:

- 1 **Imidlalo** (Sport) *Khetha umdlalo owuthanda kakhulu, undichazele ngawo.*  
(Choose a sport which you like best, and tell me about it.)
- 2 **Umzantsi-Afrika** (South Africa) *Wena uncokola nabantu baseMelika.*  
*Khawubaxelele ngomZantsi-Afrika.*  
(You are talking to people from/of America.  
Tell them about South Africa.)
- 3 **Amaphepha-ndaba** (Newspapers) *Ucinga ukuba kubalulekile ukufunda amaphepha -ndaba? Kutheni?*  
(Do you think it is important to read newspapers? Why?)

For the listening comprehension test, commands were used in order to simulate real-life situations. In asking the pupil to carry out a command, the examiner hoped to establish the level of development of the listening comprehension skill of the pupil being tested. The commands were formulated in such a manner that the pupil could respond only if he/she understood the meaning of the vocabulary items used in the command.

Questions were asked for the purpose of obtaining information from the pupil. Statements used in the test items were to establish how well the pupil understood the message communicated to him/her.

## SCORING

### SECTION A

No marks were allocated in this section.

### SECTION B

One point per acceptable item of information comprehended by the pupil as reflected in his physical or verbal response. (12)

### SECTION C

#### SERIES A

One point per acceptable utterance made by the pupil. (12)

#### SERIES B

One point per acceptable utterance made by the pupil. (12)

### SECTION D

(See oral evaluation form.) (20)

(TOTAL: 56)

**SECTION D**

**ORAL EXAMINATION EVALUATION FORM**

<b>Proficiency</b>	<b>No Response</b>	<b>Very Poor</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Fluency						
Grammar						
Vocabulary						
Effort to communicate						
<b>TOTAL: 20</b>						

**SCORING GUIDELINES: DEFINITION OF EACH LEVEL ON THE SCALE**

**FLUENCY**

**No response**

**Very poor**

Speaker has many unnatural pauses.

**Poor**

Communication is realised through considerable effort on the part of the interviewer, speaker leaves sentences unfinished, lapses into silence, appears unable or unwilling to keep the conversation going.

**Fair**

Relies heavily on material to formulate response. While the speaker may produce a fairly lengthy reply, the intended meaning is not always clear.

**Good**

Speaker is confident of the ability to communicate and makes a considerable effort to get a point across, even non-verbally. Willingly adds material to the conversation.

**Excellent**

Speaker is sufficiently confident of the ability to communicate by using the language actively to seek information. May begin asking the interviewer questions. Shows awareness of differences in levels of usage.

**GRAMMAR**

**No response**

**Very poor**

Grammar almost entirely inaccurate.

**Poor**

Can use only brief statement with no real syntax. May try to use isolated words or phrases, but is unable to make their interrelationships clear.

**Fair**

Shows awareness of grammatical features of the target language (classes, agreement, tenses). Transforms verb forms and word order into the forms and syntax needed for a reply.

**Good**

Grammatical errors do not cloud meaning. Does not need to model a reply on structures used previously. Able to use tenses other than the present appropriately.

**Excellent**

Errors are rare. Speaker can respond to corrections suggested by the interviewer or corrects own errors readily. Uses accurately nearly all the grammar presented to date. Willing to experiment with acquired language material.

**VOCABULARY**

**No response**

**Very poor**

Vocabulary very limited.

**Poor**

Vocabulary insufficient for simple conversation.

**Fair**

Sometimes inserts an English/Afrikaans word which has an equivalent pronunciation in Xhosa. Lacks active vocabulary.

**Good**

Adequate command of vocabulary taught. Can ask interviewer in target language to fill in occasional gaps. Choice of words usually accurate.

**Excellent**

Able to use virtually all vocabulary required. Has learnt extra vocabulary to describe special interests.

**EFFORT TO COMMUNICATE**

**No response**

Pupil is constantly asked questions to encourage response.

**Very poor**

No utterances rendered.

**Poor**

Pupil makes little effort to communicate.

**Fair**

Pupil makes an effort to communicate. Tries to complete the task. May add something not required by the task.

**Good**

Pupil makes a special effort to communicate. Makes an extreme effort to complete the task. Goes beyond the required task.

**Excellent**

Pupil makes an unusually good effort to communicate. Shows almost over-zealous effort to complete the task. Goes way beyond the required task. Uses all possible resources, verbal and non-verbal, to express herself/himself.

**2.4 Analysing the pretest results**

On receiving the data on the trial test, it was decided on the advice of consultants to do the following calculations. These had a bearing on validity, reliability and on possible interpretation of the results.

The researcher, in consultation with the consultants, calculated the significance of the difference of the various variables in the test as well as the correlation of these variables with one another.

The consultants assisted the researcher in determining acceptability. This was based on the following factors:

- discrimination between good and bad performance in the trial test
- significant spread in the allocation of marks amongst the testees
- practicability in administering the test
- comparison of the trial test results with other school results obtained in Xhosa
- comparison of the internal sections of all the subtests
- statistical significance of difference
- correlation
- relationship between the different sections of the test.

The following table shows the results of the trial test as well as school results gained during the first quarter of the term.

**Table 1 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

School	Pupil	Sex	Home Lang	Sections* of Xhosa test			Total %	School results (Xhosa)		School oral test (Xhosa)	
				B	C	D		(Xhosa)	(Xhosa)		
				CA	CB						
				(12)	(12)	(12)	(20)	(56)	%	%	%
A	1	F	Eng	5	3	0	8	16	28,5	51,3	56
	2	F	Dutch	11	6	9	10	36	64,2	80	73
	3	F	Eng	11	7	11	13	42	75	76	75
	4	F	Eng	12	10	10	13	45	80,3	76,5	70
	5	F	Eng	8	4	7	10	29	51,7	67,8	63
	6	F	Eng	8	9	6	11	34	60,7	60,8	61
	7	F	Eng	8	3	4	11	26	46,4	51,7	56
B	1	F	Afr	6	5	4	10	25	44,6	63,3	63,3
	2	F	Afr	6	2	3	8	19	33,9	53,3	53
	3	F	Afr	6	2	3	8	19	33,9	50	50
	4	F	Afr	8	6	7	10	31	55,3	63,3	63
	5	M	Afr	6	4	3	9	22	39,2	50	50
	6	F	Afr	6	8	4	9	27	48,2	46,6	46,6
	7	F	Afr	6	5	4	10	25	44,6	58,3	58,3

\*SECTION

B – Test on listening comprehension  
 CA – Test on functions

CB – Test on notions  
 D – Test on unstructured conversation.

## 2.5 Testing for validity, reliability and practicality

### 2.5.1 Validity

It is customary to distinguish various types of validity: face, criterion and construct validity. To determine whether a test shows any of the three types of validity mentioned above, it may be subjected to certain forms of evaluation.

For establishing face validity, test consultants may be asked to evaluate how applicable the test is to its purpose; criterion validity may be ascertained by selecting an available external criterion which is supposed to measure the same characteristic that the test sets out to measure; and construct validity may be determined by showing or arguing how the test items actually represent the construct of the test.

Face validity of this test was determined by consulting test consultants during the phase of constructing the test, as explained above.

Construct validity was argued in the overview of how the test items, and their organisation into various sections, were selected and finally formulated.

Criterion validity may be determined statistically. As stated earlier on, an external criterion is required. In this study, the only available external criterion was the scores given by teachers at the two schools of the individual pupils in their Xhosa tests. To facilitate maximum comparison with the trial test, tests results for the first quarter were selected as the criterion. Two sets of information were used: the total Xhosa school test results and the oral Xhosa school test as taken during the above-mentioned test.

It can be argued that the purpose of the total Xhosa school test was to evaluate writing and comprehension in Xhosa, while the trial test had been structured to test listening, comprehension, notions, functions and unstructured conversation. These are two sets of variables.

Results of the trial test and the total Xhosa school test, therefore, were expected to be different.

Based on the data presented in Table 1, application of the Spearman rank-order correlation gave a value of 0,21, which is regarded as a low correlation.

The coefficient of correlation is a statistic which expresses the degree of relationship between two sets of test scores or other variables. In correlation studies, researchers are interested in determining the degree of relationship between pairs of two or more variables. In other words, correlation studies allow researchers to determine the extent to which scores on one test are associated with scores on another test.

Spearman's rank-order correlation  $R_s$  measures correlation in ranking order of testees according to the two measurements. A test for difference between means, according to the t-test, produced a value of -3,64 (significant at 0,01). These statistical values confirmed that different results were gained by the two measures.

On the strength of this outcome, it was concluded that the trial test measured different characteristics from the total Xhosa school test.

It can be argued that the oral Xhosa school test came nearest to measuring oral proficiency in Xhosa, which was what the trial test set out to do. It was therefore expected that there would be a high correlation between results of the oral Xhosa school test and the trial test.

Applications of the Spearman rank-order ( $R_s=0,75$ ) and the product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r=0,84$ ) confirmed this expectation. If there had been a perfect relationship between the two sets of scores, the magnitude of the correlation coefficient would have been +1. A + 1 correlation coefficient indicates a perfect positive correlation. The greater the value, the stronger the relationship between the two variables. It can be stated therefore that ( $R_s = 0,75$ ) and ( $r = ,84$ ) are

great enough (they are near enough to +1) to regard the correlation as high. Based on the above findings it can be concluded that sections of the Xhosa communicative test showed a high level of criterion validity.

### 2.5.2 Validity and reliability

In order to evaluate both the validity and reliability of the different sections of the trial test, mean scores, standard deviations, as well as differences amongst the various mean scores were inspected (Table 2).

**Table 2 INTERNAL COMPARISON OF SECTIONS IN TRIAL TEST**

Section of Xhosa Trial test	Means	St. deviation
B	63,66	18,65
C A	44,32	21,35
C B	44,62	25,85
D	50,00	8,09
TOTAL	50,46	15,34

  

Comparison of Sections	T value	Significance
B – C A	6,78	0,01
B – C B	6,75	0,01
B – D	4,00	0,01
C A – C B	-0,11	–
C A – D	-1,36	–
C B – D	-1,02	–

On inspection of Table 2, particularly the column which shows the mean scores and the standard deviation, it will be noticed that section B of the trial test (listening comprehension) has a higher mean (63,66). This shows that the pupils' listening comprehension skill was better developed. This is in line with the findings of Chastain (1976), Nord (1980), Wilkes (1981) and Thiele (1983).

Chastain (1976:278) points out that the four language skills are all based on the same language system, which seems to be acquired in a series of definitely sequenced operations. First, the learners perceive a certain sequence of the language and discriminate among what they consider to be important linguistic aspects of the language. Second, they comprehend the distinctions involved and begin to formulate their own language system. Third, based on their hypothesis about the language, they develop a personal competence. Fourth, once they have the competence, they begin to use their performance skills.

Nord (1980:5) confirms the above argument and points out that it is a well documented fact that comprehension precedes speaking in the young child. He states that this sequence of development – comprehension first, production second – is a functional property of the human brain, which should not be violated in language instruction. He maintains that foreign language instruction should discourage speaking until a high degree of comprehension is achieved, that is until the student can understand an elementary conversation and decode it with ease. Nord argues further that there appears to be extensive evidence to support the positive transfer from listening to speaking. This study also confirmed the above perception. The finding that the score of other sections show no statistical difference should be acceptable because C A and C B (notions and functions) are integrated components and should therefore show the same level of scores.

Acceptable performance in D presupposes linguistic ability to perform in C A and C B. Communication involves ability to use functions and notions correctly in appropriate situations. D is

therefore composed of some components reflected in C A and C B and should therefore not show statistical difference in the scores. This is confirmed by the finding in Table 2.

B, C A and C B are objective tests and D is subjective. The standard deviations in B, C A and C B are higher than in D. The possible reason for this may be that the tester (in both cases) may be inclined to centre marking around mean positions. It was advised therefore that strict adherence to marking procedure in D should be followed.

### 2.5.3 Reliability

Since consistency of results is the basic concept of reliability of a test, if a test or subtest produces the same or very nearly the same relative ordering and distance between the individuals in the group on both occasions, the test would be judged to have high stability reliability. Stability reliability is often referred to as test-retest reliability because it is estimated by testing, some time later retesting the same individuals, and then correlating the scores.

Since only one tester was used for this study, it was necessary to determine if this tester applied the test in a consistent way. This is known as intra-individual reliability.

To test for reliability a test-retest procedure was used (Table 3). A high level of stability was established.

**Table 3 PRESENTATION OF TEST AND RETEST RESULTS**

School	Pupil	Sex	Trial test %	Final test %
A	1	F	28	28,5
	2	F	64,2	
	3	F	75	
	4	F	80	
	5	F	51,7	
	6	F	60,7	
	7	F	46,4	
B	1	F	44	44,6
	2	F	33,9	
	3	F	33,9	
	4	F	55,3	
	5	M	39,2	
	6	F	48,2	
	7	F	44,6	

In Table 3 above, the researcher tried to prove the reliability of the test. This was done by comparing the results of both the trial test and the final test obtained from some pupils at the same schools, at two monthly intervals. This test produced the same or very nearly the same relative ordering and distance between the individuals in the group on both occasions.

### 2.5.4 Practicability

Another feature of the trial test was its practicability, which involved such factors as time and ease of scoring. One may agree with Liskin-Gasparro (1984:483) that a direct test of writing and speaking ability will never be truly practical, since it would be conducted by human raters. Nevertheless, the trial test was easy to administer and to score. Although the time taken to administer the test was longer than expected, adjustments could be made to solve this problem.

The researcher also attempted to make the test as authentic as possible. Simulated real-life interactive communicative operations were used in preparing the test.

## 2.6 Overall remarks on the trial test

It was accepted that the trial test could be improved over a period of time. For example, the test would be more meaningful if all its test items were organised around a theme. Canale (1984:354) confirms the view that thematic organisation is one of the features worth considering in improving language testing. A thematically organised test would represent and group those tasks that provide a coherent, natural, and motivating structure to the test. In the trial test, for instance, the researcher should ideally have considered a variety of subthemes and language tasks naturally linked to an overall theme such as education. In section D the examiner could have asked each testee to tell him about his/her school for example. This technique would have bridged an information gap, since the examiner was a total stranger to all the testees. By using schooling as a theme, he would have been able to use the test items in a more cohesive and natural manner.

The test was integrated in that the functions and notions were used in a context. There was also social interaction between the examiner and the pupil. In other words, language was used for the purpose of bringing out social meaning. The pupil responded to what the examiner was saying to him. As the test was an achievement test by nature, it had elements of achievement in it which were related to the syllabus preceding it.

## 2.7 Assembling the final form of the test

Time was a crucial factor. The examiner was given specific times at which to visit the schools in order not to disturb the schools' programmes. It was realised that some of the language items used in the test were new to the pupils when the pupils took a longer time to respond. These few items were either deleted or substituted after consultation.

In sections B and C a sentence was included in the instruction to the pupil. It read as follows:

Each sentence will be read twice and you must respond immediately after the second time.

This was intended to make the instructions as clear and explicit as possible. Because the pupil was not used to being addressed by a Xhosa mother-tongue speaker, it was assumed that he would experience difficulty at first in understanding the examiner.

In Section B item 7 the word "iyanetha" was substituted by "iyana". The pupils were acquainted with "iyana" as the word appears in the course book. It was decided to delete the word "kuyabanda" in order to deal with one thought in the sentence, thus saving responding time.

The word "emanzini" in item 11 was deleted for the same reason.

In section C series A, the word "weqakamba" in item 2 was replaced by "wombhoxo" to make it easier for the pupil to comprehend. The words "yombhoxo" and "yehoki" were deleted in order to cut down on reaction time by the pupil.

The phrase "uza kuphatha" was replaced by "uphethe". The former was found to be semantically incorrect in that it suggests one is cautious of what one possesses at that particular time.

Because the pupils were not used to the word "eMelika" in section C series B item 2, it was replaced by 'ERhawutini'. Item 11 was replaced by the following:

"Indaba ze T.V. ziguqulwa ngubani?"

The reason for this change was that the original test item tended to evaluate translation skills of the pupils, a variable which this test was not intended to measure.

In section D, topic 1 was changed to read: Khetha imidlalo oyithanda kakhulu, undichazele ngayo.

This change gave the pupil the opportunity to discuss more than one sport. The pupil could thus use all the vocabulary related to the various sports instead of being restricted to discussing only one.

A final test was reproduced. Marks were allocated as in the trial test. A summary sheet was prepared for entering all available marks of each testee.

## 2.8 Test administration

A total of 159 pupils was tested from twenty-six schools. The fourteen pupils tested in the provisional test were included in the group tested. This inclusion appeared to have no effect on the results of the overall test because on average the scores for the provisional as well as the main test were the same. The scoring was not abnormal.

Consider the following table:

**Table 4 AVERAGE SCORES OF PROVISIONAL AND MAIN TESTS**

School	N	Provisional test	Main test
		Average %	Average %
1	7	57,7	58,0
2	7	42,5	42,8

It was decided to include as subjects all the pupils enrolled to study Xhosa at Senior Certificate level under the Cape Department of Education. The tests were carried out in April and May 1985 in the Western Cape and in July of the same year in the Eastern Cape and Border. After the testing had been completed, the raw data was computed and the data was displayed in computer printouts.

## 2.9 Evaluation of the final test

A further statistic was used to check the reliability of the full final test to ascertain discriminative reliability analysis. This was done by dividing the students into two groups: the bottom twenty-five percent who obtained the lowest marks (group 1) and the top twenty-five percent who obtained the highest marks (group 2). The significance of differences in performance in the final test of the two groups was calculated. The results are given in the following table:

\*Following: M. Norusis: Introductory statistics guide SPSSX

**Table 5 COMPARISON OF GROUP1 AND GROUP2 IN FINAL TEST**

Group	N	Means	Section of Xhosa Final test	Significance
1	45	43,7	B	0,000
2	40	85		
1	45	17,0	CA	0,000
2	40	71,2		
1	45	18,1	CB	0,000
2	40	73,2		
1	45	40,4	D	0,000
2	40	66,0		

In Table 5 the difference in performance in all the sections of the final test between group 1 and group 2 is shown to be highly significant, 0,000 (at .025 probability level). The performance of each group is also consistent. In other words, the lowest group maintains the same level of performance (remains lowest) in all the sections of the final test whilst the group with the highest marks maintains the same level of performance in the final test as well.

This table confirms the initial conclusion regarding the reliability of the test. Therefore, the test met its requirements. The above discussion has attempted to prove the test's validity and reliability.

## 2.10 Test constraints

The examiner as well as the testees were subjected to several constraints. These were similar to those identified by Mareschal (1980:48):

- finding tricks to make artificial situations look more natural and conducive to spontaneous speech
- enticing confidence on the part of the testee
- developing a test which is simple, easy to score, short and valid.

To build up the pupil's confidence, the examiner took the initiative, greeting the pupil, asking a few questions and explaining the purpose of the test. This encouraged the pupil to respond fairly naturally and unaffectedly.

From the onset, the test was constructed in an economical manner so as to be practicable and to save time.

## 2.11 Conclusion

In this study an attempt to merge linguistic theory with practice has been discussed. The researcher has shown how the objectives of a communicative syllabus may be evaluated by means of a communicative language test.

Steps and guidelines which may be followed in constructing a language test have been suggested and applied in constructing a communicative test for pupils learning Xhosa at Senior Certificate level. The test items did not emphasise linguistic accuracy, but the ability to function effectively through language in particular settings and contexts. The implication was that linguistic activity should be of kinds and under conditions which approximate real life.

The application of communicative language testing to the communicative language teaching approach has been an attempt to show how linguistic theory can be tested in practice, and how the difficulties of practice can be referred to theory. It is obvious, however, that further research is still required.

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