Speaking Test 1: Testing Russian Grammar in Beginner Learners' Speech (Comics type picture panels)

This test is designed to assess the accuracy of the production of Russian case endings in learners' unprepared speech. It uses comics type panels, based on a famous Russian novel to elicit structures that require the use of Prepositional an Accusative cases

Despite the common agreement that the aim of learning foreign language grammar is its implicit (often referred to as "procedural") knowledge, that is, its use in learners' speech (Ellis 2006), there is no consensus on how this goal could be reached. Neither is there a tool for measuring the accuracy of the production of certain grammatical features by a learner in their speech, which could be effectively used in a language classroom.

This test is designed to assess the accuracy of the production of Russian case endings in learners' unprepared speech. It uses comics type panels to elicit structures that require the use of Prepositional an Accusative cases. The 19 panels are based on a famous Russian novel "The Twelve Chairs" by Ilf and Petrov, which was heavily adapted to suit the purpose of the test.

This "comics" test has been successfully used for the data collection for a PhD study at the University of Leeds, UK, when 34 participants were tested and produced 17-20 unrehearsed sentences in Russian after only 20 hours of study.

The test can be easily replicated for other grammar categories and can be based on various stories and episodes, thus providing a useful tool for language teachers, particularly at the beginner level.

Suggestions for administering the test

Learners normally produce one sentence per panel; some might do more, or more for some panels. Thus, the test aims to elicit at least 18 sentences. Please note that, though the test is not assessing vocabulary, learners should *not* request words and will have to use their own structures to construct their sentences. However, to help learners produce obligatory context (that is case phrases), examiners might choose to provide certain words on flash cards, for example, «

????????» to elicit «?? ?????????». (We have also found out that learners do not necessarily know the word «??????», which is essential for the story line). In addition, if learners are struggling to produce a sentence on a particular panel, or if they rely on Prepositional and avoid Accusative, the examiner can ask a guided question to prompt the right context. The examiner needs to make sure that guided questions do *not* contain any case forms, for example, «???? ???? ??????» is permitted, while «????? ???? ? ???????» is *not*. To ease the processing load, the characters can be referred to as «??» and «???». Learners should be informed about these rules *before* the test. The test itself takes between 12 to 20 minutes, depending on learner's pace of speaking, confidence and previous speaking practice.

Authors

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References

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