Learning-Oriented Assessment: The Affective Dimension

Michelle Stabler-Havener
Teachers College, Columbia University

As elucidated by Purpura and Turner in their presentation at the Teachers College Columbia University Round Table in Second Language Studies (TCCRISLS) 2014 conference, language-oriented assessment (LOA) emphasizes the centrality of learning when the interrelatedness between instruction, assessment, and learning are examined. The LOA framework is composed of seven dimensions: the contextual dimension, the elicitation dimension, the proficiency dimension, the learning dimension, the instructional dimension, the interactional dimension, and the affective dimension. This article will explore the affective dimension as it surfaced in the papers presented at the TCCRISLS conference.

Aspects that the affective dimension considers comprise elements such as learners' emotions, motivation, attitudes and beliefs about learning, and personality traits such as introversion and extroversion. Although literature exists on the affective dimension of teaching and learning including the effects of emotion, self-regulation, and motivation (Hall & Goetz, 2013; Dornyei, 2005), little research has been done on how affect influences assessment (Turner & Purpura, 2015). Even so, to varying degrees, the conference papers noted ways that the affective dimension impacts adult and young learners' assessment performances and influences the way that assessments are administered.

Leung (2014) addressed four responses adult learners had to the feedback on their written assignments, i.e., rejectionist, critical acceptance, happy let-it-pass, and fulsome reception. The students' responses were demonstrated in four short transcripts presented by Leung. Illustrating the rejectionist reaction, one learner, Amy, admitted that her discontent with critical teacher feedback and her grade, both written on the first page of her paper, kept her from reading any further comments provided by her instructor throughout the rest of her paper. Lucas, another learner, found teacher feedback to be face-threatening. He came to the university to pursue a master's degree; not to improve his English ability. Therefore, he did not feel that instructors should comment on his grammar. Notwithstanding his defensive response, Lucas is an example of critical acceptance because he later came to appreciate the instructor's comments. Rather than the purely negative affect that Amy and Lucas expressed, Sadie communicated that she did not receive the feedback in an entirely negative manner. Instead, she understood that feedback would assist her as she revised her paper. Concurrently, however, Sadie expressed anxiety that her poor performance might have disappointed her teacher, whom she wanted to please because of the excellence of her teacher's instruction. The fulsome reception that Fe demonstrates is severe self-criticism. She is deeply embarrassed by her mistakes because she believes that as an English teacher, she should not make the type of mistakes that her university instructor needed to correct.

In the four type of responses discussed above, every student interviewed by Leung had a negative affective response to the teacher correction to some degree. Nonetheless, Amy was the only person who completely rejected the feedback that she received. At the same time, Fe also had an extremely negative emotional response to teacher feedback, though unlike Amy, she accepted her mistakes. Still it is uncertain whether or not Fe was able to overcome her intense self-criticism to the degree that is necessary to be able to apply the corrective feedback. Likewise, although teachers desire students to approach feedback seriously, the extreme negative affect that is tied to Fe's acceptance of the assessment is undesirable as it could impair learning

by causing her to only focus on her mistakes and overlook nurturing her own strengths. In contrast, both Lucas and Sadie were able to manage their negative feelings associated with teacher correction and find benefit in the comments that they received. At the same time, there was no evidence in the data that Lucas applied what he learned through teacher feedback to future assignments, and fear of letting her teacher down kept Sadie from taking the next step of maximizing the learning opportunity provided by the formative assessment, which was to discuss the feedback she received with her teacher.

In addition to discussing the affective dimension and its impact on adult learners, two sessions referred to how affect might influence the assessment of children. Wolf and Lopez (2014) explored the extent to which scaffolded support, embedded in a tablet-based scenario test, contributed to students' performances. To demonstrate, Wolf showed clips of tests that featured simple, colorful cartoons. In one example, a teacher explained how to mix blue and yellow paint to make the color green. In response to the clip, test-takers were given more than one opportunity to describe the process they watched. During the presentation, Wolf remarked that it was typical for students to not respond to the first prompt that asked them to retell a story. A possibility stated for students unresponsiveness included students' affect—they were extremely nervous as a result of their unfamiliarity with the test format. Other reasons students were silent after the first prompt might have been that they did not have enough language to answer or because of their unfamiliarity with the test. The affective dimension in regard to the assessment of young learners surfaced during the question and answer session following Tsagari's (2014) paper. During her presentation, Tsagari discussed transcript data in which a teacher attempted to elicit responses from students regarding the number of friends that they had and a description of their friends. At first, students were silent when the teacher asked them questions. In the presentation, learners' hesitation to respond was attributed to the teacher's elicitation method. Following the presentation, an audience member suggested that one student's reluctance to speak might have resulted from her feelings toward the query's content. Perhaps the learner did not immediately reply when asked if she had many friends because she was embarrassed that she did not have friends. Further, it is worth contemplating that when the learner was later asked if her friend was pretty, she vacillated because her friend was ugly, but she did not want to offend her friend, who was in the same class.

In addition to adult and young learners, TCCRISLS conference papers cited that assessment administrators' feelings, moreover, influence the assessment process. Hamp-Lyons stated that a sympathetic interlocutor affected test-takers' performances on examinations in her co-authored paper (Hamp-Lyons & Green, 2014). When a test-taker cannot answer a question because of its level of difficulty, a sympathetic test administrator (in contrast to an unsympathetic one) asks another, often easier question, in order to elicit a speech sample that can be rated, as opposed to not assigning a score to that test question. Vis-à-vis the topic of how assessment administers affect influences assessment, Hill (2014) acknowledged that teachers' ideas and feelings about assessment, chiefly their insecurity regarding assessment practices, impact how they approach and administer classroom-based assessments.

As aforementioned, the conference papers addressed how the affective dimension influences adult and young learners' assessment performances as well as assessment administration. Although the affective dimension appeared in a few of the TCCRISLS papers, it was not the focal point of any of the presentations and some of the papers did not mention the affective dimension whatsoever. This seems to suggest that more research on the affective

dimension of LOA is required to flesh out educators' understandings of its impact on learners' assessment performances.

REFERENCES

Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hall, N., & Goetz, T. (2013). *Emotion, motivation, and self-regulation: A handbook for teachers*. Bingley, UK: Emerald.

Hamp-Lyons, L., & Green, A. (2014). *Applying a concept model of learning-oriented language assessment to a large-scale speaking test.* Presentation at the Roundtable on Learning-Oriented Assessment in Language Classrooms and Large-Scale Contexts, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

Hill, K. (2014, October). *A framework for promoting teacher awareness of their CBA practices and learning-oriented assessment.* Presentation at the Roundtable on Learning-Oriented Assessment in Language Classrooms and Large-Scale Contexts, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

Leung, C. (2014, October). *Learning from feedback: Conception, reception, and consequences.* Presentation at the Roundtable on Learning-Oriented Assessment in Language Classrooms and Large-Scale Contexts, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

Tsagari, D. (2014, October). *Unplanned LOA in EFL classrooms: Findings from an empirical study.* Presentation at the Roundtable on Learning-Oriented Assessment in Language Classrooms and Large-Scale Contexts, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

Purpura, J. E., & Turner, C. E. (2014, October). *A learning-oriented assessment approach to understanding the complexities of classroom-based language assessment.* Presentation at the Roundtable on Learning-Oriented Assessment in Language Classrooms and Large-Scale Contexts, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

Turner, C. E., & Purpura, J. E. (2015). Learning-oriented assessment in the classroom. In D. Tsagari & J. Banerjee (Eds.). *Handbook of second language assessment.* Berlin, Germany/Boston, MA: DeGruyter Mouton.

Wolf, M., & Lopez, A. (2014, October). *The use of scaffolding strategies in the assessment of English learners.* Presentation at the Roundtable on Learning-Oriented Assessment in Language Classrooms and Large-Scale Contexts, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

Michelle Stabler-Havener is a doctoral student of Applied Linguistics at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her current research interests include classroom-based assessment and teacher training. She can be reached at: mls2262@tc.columbia.edu.