Current trends in language assessment supporting learning and teaching: combining the diagnostic and dynamic assessment frameworks

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The presentation reports on an innovative approach to second and foreign language (L2) assessment that combines diagnostic and dynamic assessment in order to support L2 learning and teaching. The approaches emerged from two rarely intersecting areas of research. Diagnostic assessment of L2 builds upon second language acquisition and language testing research to define language constructs in order to find out about learners' strengths and particularly weaknesses. Serious interest in diagnostic L2 assessment started in the late 1990s with the design of DIALANG, a multilingual diagnostic assessment and feedback system (Alderson 2005). Despite the more recent developments that call for the importance of ensuring that diagnostic assessment and feedback lead to meaningful action that addresses the identified weaknesses in learner performance (e.g. Alderson et al. 2015; Huhta et al. 2024), the integration of diagnostic assessment with subsequent pedagogical action is still considered an underdeveloped aspect of this approach to assessment.

Dynamic assessment is rooted in Sociocultural Theory and based on the work of Vygotsky (e.g. 1978) in the early decades of the 20th century and aims to identify not only learner abilities that have fully developed but also those in the process of maturing. In dynamic assessment, whenever the learner encounters problems during the assessment, the assessor (mediator) intervenes and guides the learner with gradually more explicit and detailed hints. The intention is the find out not only what the learner can do independently but also what they can do with assistance (e.g. Poehner 2008; Poehner & Lantolf 2014).

Dynamic assessment can address the main weakness of diagnostic assessment, namely, how to connect assessment with action. For its part, dynamic assessment is not particularly strong in defining assessed constructs, which, however, is the strength of diagnostic L2 assessment. Thus, the two approaches complement each other in a very significant way.

The combination of diagnostic and dynamic assessment is currently investigated in the DD-LANG research project in Finland. The project focuses on supporting upper secondary school students' English reading and writing development through online (computerised) and classroom activities that implement dynamic assessment-based mediation and AI-generated online tasks. The presentation will use the project as a source of information in order to illustrate both the conceptual and practical aspects of the combined diagnostic-dynamic assessment approach. Of particular interest is the implementation of mediation in computerised L2 reading comprehension tasks, which has rarely been investigated. Some initial results of the research project will also be reported.