AN EVALUATION OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION TESTS FROM A COMMUNICATIVE PERSPECTIVE: A CASE STUDY[i]

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Abstract:

This study aims to evaluate the listening comprehension tests submitted to students from a communicative perspective. An exploratory study was conducted for the collection of data. The results from the qualitative analysis of the collected data were interpreted and discussed using constructivism as a learning theory and theories of language testing under the psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic period. This interpretation and the discussion indicated that the listening comprehension tests submitted to learners of the department of English of the University of Félix Houphouët-Boigny do not sufficiently concur with the principles of communicative language testing. Suggestions to improve the situation are mainly based on the inclusion of authentic activities based on the social and cultural context of learners, the inclusion of activities which enable learners to integrate other language skills and the construction of listening comprehension tests based on the principle of "unpredictable language input" and "creative language output".

Keywords: communicative perspective, evaluation, listening comprehension

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Résumé:

Cette étude vise à évaluer les examens de compréhension orale soumis aux étudiants du point de vue communicatif. Une étude exploratoire a été menée pour la collecte des données. Les résultats de l'analyse qualitative des données collectées ont été interprétés et discutés à l'aide du constructivisme en tant que théorie de l'apprentissage et des théories de l'évaluation des langues dans le cadre de la période psycholinguistique-sociolinguistique. Cette interprétation et la discussion ont indiqué que les tests de compréhension orale soumis aux apprenants du département d'anglais de l'Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny ne respectent pas suffisamment les principes de l'évaluation communicative des langues. Les suggestions pour améliorer la situation sont principalement basées sur l'inclusion d'activités authentiques basées sur le contexte social et culturel des apprenants, l'inclusion d'activités qui permettent aux apprenants d'intégrer d'autres compétences linguistiques et la construction de tests de compréhension orale basés sur le principe de "l'apport linguistique imprévisible" et de "l'apport linguistique créatif".

Mots clés : perspective communicative, évaluation, compréhension orale

1. Introduction

Language is at the center of social interaction. New understanding on how foreign languages is best achieved have stressed the use of language, which has paved a way for some paradigmatic shifts. The field of language teaching and learning has shifted from a focus on form to a focus on meaning construction in an authentic social context. The main objective is to develop foreign language learners' communicative competence. Among various approaches, such as community language teaching and competency-based language teaching, which emphasize communicative competence, communicative language teaching is highlighted in this research work. Perceived as a learner-centered approach, Communicative language teaching aims at actively involving students in classroom activities related to real-life situations so as to develop their communicative competence. This philosophy of language teaching has led to test development, which reflects the principles of CLT. Nunan (2009) indicates that the connection between teaching and testing is the fundamental principle of curricular design. Thus, communicative language teaching needs communicative language testing in order to achieve the intended communicative language outcomes.

Listening is one of the most used and important skills in English language learning (Mendelson, 1994), which facilitates the development of the other skills (Hassan, 2000). In the Ivorian context, more precisely at the Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny (UFHB), first and second year listening comprehension classes are conducted on the ground of the communicative language teaching. There is, therefore, a need to test students accordingly. More precisely, listening comprehension tests should then be based on the

principles of the communicative approach. This paper aims to evaluate the Listening tests submitted to L1 and L2 students under the principles of CLT.

Thanks to my personal experience at the Department of English as a second language learner at UFHB, I realized that during our listening comprehension exams, learners were involved in some activities once they had listened to some audio passages. Generally, these activities include multiple-choice questions, matching activities, yes or no questions, and gap-filling activities. I, afterward, compared those tests with the principles of communicative language testing. I grasp some deficiencies in the L1 and L2 listening comprehension tests in this regard. In order to verify my assumption, an interview was conducted with some teachers who confirmed that those tests were based on principles of communicative language testing. This, therefore, prompted me to take a further step toward exploring the discrepancies that exist between the L1 and L2 listening test and the communicative language testing. In order to draw the curtains on these debates on the weakness of the listening test submitted to 1ˢᵗ and 2ⁿᵈ year students with regard the principles of CLT, a number of questions that beg for answers read as follows:

- What is the level of communicativeness of the listening comprehension tests used for the L1 and L2 students at the Department of English?
- What are the characteristics of the listening comprehension tests submitted to the L1 and L2 students?
- What are their strengths and weaknesses with regard to the principles of communicative language testing (CLT)?
- How does one design listening comprehension tests for the L1 and L2 students that best reflect the principles of CLT?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Communicative Competence

In the field of communication assessment, the concept of "*communicative competence*" has been proposed by researchers. It is a concept invented by a sociolinguist called Dell Hymes in 1971. It opposed the concept of "*linguistic competence*" used earlier by Noam Chomsky (1965). After Hymes, many other researchers have studied this concept in recent years. For Bagaric & Djigunovic (2007), the term "*communicative competence*" refers to a set of competences required to be capable of applying the language in real communicative use.

From the aforementioned, communicative competence has to do with one's ability to communicate. Further, communicative competence is the ability to achieve the communicative goal in a socially appropriate manner (Kiessling and Fabry, 2021). According to the definitions given, communicative competence is a person's ability to communicate. For this reason, Hymes disagreed with the use of the concept of "*linguistic competence*", as he believed that this notion was unreal and could not be effectively studied in itself. While linguists such as Chomsky and Lado had linked knowledge of a language to knowledge of discrete points of that language, communicative testers

disagreed, arguing that language is best learned when used for communicative purposes (Wesche, 1983).

In addition, other socio-linguists such as Canale and Swain (1981) have pointed out that communicative competence has four components. These components are: linguistic or grammatical (ability to create grammatically correct utterances), sociolinguistic (awareness of the social rules of language, e.g. formality, politeness, etc.), strategic (use of techniques to overcome linguistic shortcomings, plan and evaluate the effectiveness of communication), and discourse (understanding how ideas are connected through patterns).

From the arguments put forward by different researchers, it can be said that the concept of communicative competence is related to the way in which a person is able to use language appropriately. However, it does not dispute the importance of the linguistic or grammatical knowledge that a speaker is expected to possess but only asserts that language is learned more effectively when it is presented in communicative situations. The focus should be on communication, not grammar. In short, communicative competence is the higher version of linguistic competence.

2.1.1 The Relevance of Listening Comprehension to Communicative Competence

Literature informs us that English is widely recognized as the universal language around the world. It is also important for students' academic success (Azeroual, 2013) and has become essential in higher education (Najeeb, 2013). According to Hedge (2000), listening has an important role in everyday life, and when people are engaged in communication, 9% is spent on writing, 16% on reading, 30% on speaking, and 45% on listening, which shows the significance of listening in the communication process.

Rost (1994), Ziane (2011), and Hien (2015) agree on the idea that listening comprehension is very important because it is a process through which we get input and without its comprehension, learning does not happen. Doff (1995) and Ziane (Op. cit.), on their part, believe that listening has a significant effect on developing speaking. In fact, we cannot develop our speaking ability unless we develop our listening skills. Emphasizing the importance of listening, Anderson and Lynch (2003) state that listening skills are as important as speaking skills because people cannot communicate face-to-face unless both types of skills are developed together. Listening skills are also important for learning purposes since, through listening, students receive information and gain insights (Wallace, Stariha & Walberg, 2004).

Listening skill is used in many areas such as school life, family relations, friends' meetings, and radio. Listening is a language skill used in any learning process. Listening is a language skill that is used with or without awareness in situations that people face in social life and in any learning process. People who do not see listening as an important social skill have not fully understood the importance of listening being an effective and powerful language skill (Aytan, T., 2011).

The literature informs that in the last two decades, due to the increasing significance of communicative competence, the role of listening skills has been stressed

(Joiner, 1997). In the last decade, much attention has been devoted to the development of listening comprehension in foreign language teaching and learning. To make sense of incoming information, learners' listening skills are a major concern. Learners interact in oral communication by interpreting the sound information provided by listening. In the process of listening, learners acquire the correct pronunciation of words and how to use words and structures accurately in a sentence. Listening enables learners to decode language knowledge and use it for successful communication. In other words, comprehensible input through listening results in comprehensible output in the target language. Rost (2002:94) emphasizes the role of listening in language acquisition and concludes that "*a key difference between more successful and less successful learners is largely related to their ability to use listening as a means of acquisition*". Listening is the key skill for language acquisition and a prerequisite for the development of other language skills. Communicative language teaching puts emphasis on language proficiency. Listening can provide learners with a great deal of linguistic information to remove barriers to the communication process. Moreover, listening and speaking are integrated in real life and influence each other. Learners fail to respond appropriately if they do not understand the input.

From what has been said above, my point of view on the importance of listening to communication competence is that listening is a skill that facilitates communication. It enables people to perceive speech words, make meaning of those words and give feedback during communication. This view is sustained by Wallace et *al*. (2004), who claim that "*listening skills are essential for learning since they enable students to acquire insight and information, and to achieve success in communicating with other*". Despite the central role it plays in language development and acquisition, listening is nonetheless one of the main areas where foreign language learners face critical difficulties (Gilakjani and Ahmadi, 2011; Hamouda, 2013) and the causes of these difficulties remain a subject of debate in the literature.

2.2 The Communicative Testing of Listening Skills
2.2.1 The Merits of Communicative Language Testing
In spite of the fact that communication tests are a challenge for test developers, it is one that provides learners with information about their ability to perform in the target language in certain real-life situations (Miyata and Langham, 2000).

First, one difficulty is the issue of predictive validity. When designing a test of communication skills, one of the basic principles is to identify the needs of candidates in terms of the communicative encounters they are likely to experience. However, it is not clear that test designers can guarantee that people who pass a test in the classroom will also be able to pass outside the classroom in a real-life situation. One reason for this is that real-life communication is characterized by unpredictability. Studies have shown that test developers have tried to create real-life tasks but have encountered difficulties due to the varied or diverse nature of the contexts (Katsumasa, 1997; Brown, 2003).

Although communicative tests have some drawbacks, these tests are very relevant as compared to traditional tests in terms of the importance of language use. According to Smaldino et al. (2000), traditional tests often focus on a learner's ability of memorization and recall, which are lower levels of cognition. Reevers (2000) believes the emphasis on performance assessment is the ability of the learner to apply his/ her knowledge and skills to real life situations.

In addition to this, traditional assessment methods have the disadvantage of lacking real-world context. These tests require students to answer questions one by one without the need to apply long-term critical reasoning skills. Thus, students lack the chance to demonstrate their reasoning skills (Hartman, 2019). Further, Hughes (2003) supports Hartman's idea by stating an advantage of communicative language testing. He states that, current theories no longer assume that language is primarily about structures requiring tests of isolated language components; on the contrary, language tends to be viewed as a way of carrying out functions or communicating meanings, therefore the relevance of communicative test lies in the fact that it measures what learners can do with language.

The aforementioned ideas show that the relevance of communicative language testing is to assess learners' ability to communicate in real life involving authentic situations. This assumption of the advantage of communicative testing is sustained by Morrow (2018), who states that communicative language testing is a holistic approach to testing in which a learner's ability is measured with reference to appropriate norms of pragmatic, social, and cultural behaviours. In lay terms, it states that the advantage of communicative language testing is to assess the students' ability to use the language in context.

2.2.2 Communicative Language Test Construction

A number of scholars have guided on communicative test construction. According to Brown (2005), there are five requirements for setting up a communicative test. These include meaningful communication, authentic situations, unpredictable language input, creative language output, and integrated language skills.

First and foremost, Brown (2005) suggested that communicative tests should test learners using authentic situations. Cumming and Maxwell (1999) attribute the first formal use of the term "*authentic*" in the context of language learning and assessment to Archibald and Newman (1988). According to Weir (1990), the test should be based on communication that is meaningful to the students, i.e. communication that meets their personal needs. It should promote and activate language that is useful to them. The use of authentic situations can increase the likelihood of achieving meaningful communication. Most importantly, language cannot be meaningful if it is devoid of context. In the same light of thought, I share the same point of view with Brown (2005), who states that communicative tests offer students the opportunity to encounter and use the target language receptively and productively in authentic situations to show how strong their language ability is.

Moreover, according to Brown (op. cit.), "*unpredictable language input*" and "*creative language production*" are the other components of communication tests. This implies that it is not always possible to predict what other speakers will say (unpredictable linguistic input) and that learners will, therefore, need to be creative in the way they respond to these situations (creative linguistic output). Learners will, therefore, need to be creative in how they respond to such situations. Learners will need to be creative in the way they use language to respond to unpredictable situations. It is, therefore, important to test learners in contexts where they will need to produce language. In the same vein, Fulcher (2000) has stated that "*in communicative testing, learners must actually produce the language*". Communicative tests should allow learners to express themselves using the language without limiting their production. They should also test learners' receptive creativity because in life, one cannot always predict what he will say in various situations. The test-takers must, therefore, be tested on their ability to cope with the context of the situation such as physical environment, status of participants, etc., (Fulcher, 2000).

Lastly, Akhemedov (2017) focuses on integrated language skills as a component of a communicative test. It should require test takers to show their ability to combine language skills as in real-life communication situations. This means that a test should require testees to show their ability to combine various language skills as demanded in real communication. These include skills that come along with communicative competence. These are: linguistic, social-linguistic, strategic, and discourse (Brown Op. cit.).

From what has been said above, we can infer that communicative tests are tests that assess learners' communicative competence. These tests should be constructed taking into consideration the social context of the learners. Thus, communicative tests should involve authentic situations. It should encourage learners to use the language as if they were involved in real communication.

2.2.3 Communicative Listening Comprehension Tests

The evolution of language teaching approaches, from the traditional to the communicative approach, has an influence on the evolution of language testing. Sujana (2000) states that language testing has moved from grammar-based language testing (GBLT), which tends to focus on assessing a person's ability to understand the elements of the language separately, to communicative language testing (CLT), which attempts to focus on assessing a person's ability to use the language in context. Within the tradition of testing procedures, there are also continuous movements from discrete to integrative item testing, from indirect to direct testing, from normative to criterion-referenced testing, and from objective to subjective testing (Sujana, 2000).

In addition, as the principles of language teaching developed, the GBLT came under fire. The results of point tests (testing one element of the language at a time), indirect tests (testing the underlying ability of language skills), and objective tests did not reflect a person's ability to use the language and had negative effects on teaching and

learning. This criticism led to the application of more communicative tests, which are adopted from communicative language teaching approaches (O'Loughlin, 2001).

Furthermore, the teaching of listening under the communicative approach has led to communicative listening testing (Ma, 2009). Literature informs that Chen (2011) is one of the researchers who pays considerable attention to the improvement of English listening comprehension skills. He emphasized that training listening comprehension skills is not about listening blindly without making choices. On the contrary, it requires appropriate methods and going from superficiality to depth. Therefore, in teaching English listening, it is necessary to consciously cultivate students' ability to anticipate. Learners need to take the time to find out about the topic, the environment and the cultural context of the language they are speaking.

The teaching of listening from the communicative language teaching focus of features related to real-life listening. It focused on authentic situations, listening to spoken English, response, and listening with a purpose. Thus, Ur (1984) puts emphasis on involving authentic situations in listening comprehension classes during listening activities. For these reasons, researchers began to give criteria that should respect the communicative listening test.

Bachman (1991) contends that communicative skill can be assessed by constructing tests that meet at least four criteria, namely: (1) tests must create an information gap; (2) test tasks must be dependent; (3) there must be integration between test tasks and test content; and (4) tests must measure a broader range of language skills (such as cohesion, function, and sociolinguistic relevance).

According to Sujana (2016), in the assessment of listening skills, the testing tradition has shifted from the assessment of sound discrimination and the separate linguistic component to the assessment of understanding of wider communication skills. Since the aim of teaching listening comprehension is to enable students to understand the native language of English, the test should be designed to be closely related to real-life communication/speech, and the selection of tasks and question types should take into account tasks performed in everyday situations.

Also, the development of listening tests is, in some ways, analogous to the development of teaching materials. Therefore, the best way to design a listening test is to provide carefully selected teaching materials. The task of the test developers is to adjust existing teaching materials into listening tests in order to meet the criteria of a listening test. When selecting listening materials, the test designer should be aware of the aspects involved in the listening test. In other words, he/she needs to know the nature of the spoken language in order to produce authentic and communicative listening tests (Sujana, op.cit).

Moreover, according to Sunjana (op.cit), the construction of communicative listening comprehension tests meets numerous difficulties. Thus, the designing of communicative listening tests is time-consuming. The difficulties lie in the fact that, compared to the development of language teaching principles, which moves very fast, the development in language testing is very slow. Theoretically, it is possible to set up

the criteria of language testing as well as design the test that fulfills the communicative language teaching principles. However, at the level of application, it is impractical and time-consuming, and it is difficult to always and totally relate the tests to real-life situations, which is due to the complexity of aspects involved in communicative language testing and the limitation of time and resources for conducting tests.

From what has been said, we can infer that communicative listening tests train learners to be good communicators since the tests assess their communicative competence. Moreover, the construction of communicative listening tests meets many difficulties, these are: impracticability, time consuming, and it is sometimes difficult to relate communicative listening tests to real-life situations.

3. Methodology

Considering the general objective of this study, which is to assess the listening comprehension tests of 1st and 2nd year in the light of communicative testing. This research belongs to the paradigm of exploratory research. More precisely, it aims at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the 1st and 2nd year listening comprehension tests as far as the principles of communicative language testing are concerned.

3.1 Data Collection

An evaluation checklist is the suitable instrument to this end. It enables us to compare the content of the evaluated material against some pre-determined principles based on the principles of communicative language testing.

Initially, the first version of the checklist contained 10 items. After further research, three items were removed. Thus, items 7, 8, and 10 did not concord with the principles of communicative testing. Also, the word "item" in the first draft of the checklist was replaced by the word "task" mainly because activities in communicative language teaching are organized in terms of tasks.

Finally, the checklist contains seven (7) criteria, all related to communicative language testing. The first criterion is to know whether or not the activities of the tests are task-based. The second criterion is about the authenticity of the activities contained in the tests. The third criterion concerns the integrative use of language in the tests. The fourth criterion deals with the flexible use of language in the tests. The fifth criterion concerns the holistic use of language in the tests. The sixth criterion is about whether or not the activities of the tests allow students to convey meaning. The seventh and last criterion is related to the creative use of language by students. The first and final versions of the checklist are presented in Appendix B.

3.2 Data Analyse

In this study, qualitative analysis of data was used to scrutinize the information collected from the evaluation of the listening comprehension tests of L1 and L2 of the English department.

4. Results

The results respectively relate to the fact that tests are task-based, their level of authenticity, and the fact that they allow integrative, flexible, holistic, meaningful and creative use of language.

4.1 The Results Relating to the Fact that Tests Are Task-based

The first criterion is to know whether or not the activities of the tests are task-based. It aims at checking if during listening comprehension tests, 1st and 2nd year students are involved in activities which require them to use the target language to achieve a specific outcome which reflects real life situations. The analysis of the listening comprehension tests submitted to the 1st year reveals that during listening comprehension tests, students have to listen to some audio tapes and either fill in some gaps or choose an answer among several ones according to what they heard in the passage. The situation is also the same for the listening comprehension tests submitted to 2nd year students.

4.2 The Results Relating to the Level of Authenticity of Tests

The second criterion is to know whether or not the activities of the listening comprehension tests of 1st and 2nd year at the Department of English are authentic (real-life). The main objective was to check if during listening comprehension tests, students are engaged in learning situations which reflect real word problems and if the input was not initially created for intentional use in the language classroom. The results of the analysis reveal the following. Concerning the listening comprehension tests of 1st year, the audio tapes generally present dialogues or interviews between two people related to sport (basketball or baseball), food, future projects, or cell phone buying. As far as the listening comprehension tests of the 2nd year are concerned, they deal with the same themes to which we can add the theme of preferences.

4.3 The Results Relating to the Fact that Tests Allow Integrative Use of Language

The third criterion is to know whether or not the activities of the listening comprehension tests allow the integrative use of other language skills. The intention was to see if during listening comprehension tests, 1st and 2nd year students at the Department of English are required to use other language abilities, in addition to the one of listening skill, to carry out the learning activities. The results of the analysis indicate that during the listening comprehension tests, students have to listen to some audio tapes and answer some multiple-choice questions or select an answer among different propositions to fill in some gap. The situation is the same in the listening comprehension tests submitted to 1st and 2nd year students.

4.4 The Results Relating to the Fact that Tests Allow Flexible Use of Language

The fourth criterion is related to the flexible use of language in the listening comprehension tests. The objective is to know if, during the listening comprehension

tests, the learners adapt their knowledge about the language to new conditions and satisfy the demands of the tests. The results of the analysis reveal the following. Concerning the listening comprehension test of 1st year at the Department of English, we can hardly identify listening activities requiring students to adapt their knowledge related to language in new environments or learning situations. In general, the main task is to listen to some audio tapes and answer some questions. The answers they have to provide are pre-determined as it is contained in the audio passages. The situation is the same for the listening comprehension tests of 2nd year.

4.5 The Results Relating to the Fact that Tests Allow the Holistic Use of Language
The fifth criterion is to assess the holistic use of language in the listening comprehension tests. The main objective is to check if during the listening comprehension tests, students are allowed to construct their understanding about the situations in the tests. The results of the analysis indicate that listening comprehension tests of L1 and L2 are constructed in order to assess their ability to discriminate among sounds and words as they are essentially involved in multiple-choice questions and gap-filling activities.

4.6 The Results Relating to the Fact that Tests Allow the Holistic Use of Language
The sixth criterion is to know whether or not the activities of the tests allow learners to convey meaning when satisfying the demands of the tests. The main objective is to see if the listening comprehension tests of 1st and 2nd year require students to create and convey meaning. The results of the analysis show that the listening comprehension tests do not contain activities requiring learners to express their thoughts, ideas, or emotions through words in the target language.

4.7 The Results Relating to the Fact that Tests Allow Creative Use of Language
The seventh criterion is to assess whether or not the listening comprehension tests submitted to 1st and 2nd year learners encourage the creative use of language. The main objective is to check if the listening comprehension tests of 1st and 2nd year require students to use language in a novel or new way. The results of the analysis indicate the following. Concerning the listening comprehension tests submitted to 1st year students at the Department of English, students are not asked to focus on a given situation to bring about or to generate something new in the target language. The situation is the same for the 2nd year listening comprehension tests.

5. Discussion

The given results indicate that the listening tests contained some weaknesses. On the foundation of the aforementioned results, the interpretation of these results revealed that the listening tests administered to the 1st and 2nd year students are characterized by an exclusive focus on learners' ability to discriminate among sounds and words, a limited replication of real-word, and an atomistic and rigid use of language.

5.1 An Exclusive Focus on Learners' Ability to Discriminate among Sounds and Words

The results of the analysis of data indicate that the listening comprehension tests submitted to the 1st and 2nd year at the Department of English extremely focus on students' ability to discriminate among sounds and words. In fact, in 1st and 2nd year, the listening comprehension tests are essentially made of three types of activities: learners listen to some audio passages and answer some multiple-choice questions, fill in some gaps and match words.

At this stage, one can argue that these tests are discrete point tests because the activities composing these tests are some examples of discrete tests. The discrete tests are constructed on the assumption that language can be divided into its component parts, and those parts are tested successfully: the components are the skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and various units of language phonology, morphology, lexicon and, syntax (Sangkala, 2014: 1). In the case of the listening comprehension tests of 1st and 2nd year at the Department of English, the focus is on phonology and phonetics.

Moreover, the discrete point test does not include the social context of the learners where verbal communication normally takes place. Therefore, with these types of tests, learners' communicative skills cannot be efficiently assessed. Success in doing the discrete tests is not readily inferable to the ability of the students to communicate in real life. In that sense, these tests are not task-based as they do not assess learners' ability to use the language to show their competence in the target language. This allows us to say that the type of listening comprehension tests administered to 1st and 2nd year students at the Department of English are not task-based.

In the same token, the exclusive focus on the assessment of learners' ability to listen and choose the right answers during the examination shows that these tests are not integrative tests. In fact, integrative tests refer to tests which include more than one language skill in measuring the performance and competence of learners. Integrative tests help assess more than one skill at a time. For example, in the listening comprehension exams, the integrative tests can assess simultaneously learners' listening and writing skills (listening to writing) or their listening and speaking skills (listening to speaking). This situation allows us to argue that the listening comprehension tests fail to fulfil another key principle of communicative testing, namely, the integrative use of language.

It follows that the listening comprehension tests submitted to 1st and 2nd year students at the Department of English are essentially made of multiple-choice questions, gap filling, and matching activities which are associated with discrete point tests. As a consequence, the listening comprehension tests of 1st and 2nd year at the Department of English are not task-based and they do not integrate other language skills. Rather, they are designed to measure a specific language ability, namely, learners' ability to discriminate and recognize some specific sounds or words. This is a weakness in efficiently measuring learners' communicative competence. This raises the following fundamental question: How can we improve the quality of these tests so that they can assess the communicative competence of learners at the Department of English?

5.2 A Limited Replication of Real-world

The results of the data analysis indicate that the listening comprehension tests submitted to the 1st and 2nd year students at the departments of English have some deficiencies in terms of the cultural context of the learners. The activities contained in the different tests are authentic but not sufficient enough to assess the learner's communicative competence. In fact, the listening tracks often contain discussions between two people, and the content of their discussion is mainly about sports, food, music, etc. Meanwhile, the content of the tracks does not incorporate the social and cultural realities of the learners because the types of sports (baseball), music (jazz or blues), and food are not common practice in the Ivorian context. On this ground, I believe that the tests are not constructed on the basis of the learners' socio-cultural context. The socio-constructivism theory suggests the inclusion of the social and cultural context of the learner in the language classroom to allow him to make sense of his learning.

Another issue concerning the listening comprehension tests of 1st and 2nd year at the Department of English is that they do not engage learners in activities that will allow them to use language creatively to convey meaning. Thus, the activities in the listening comprehension tests do not allow learners to produce new ideas based on the information in the listening passage. It is, therefore, difficult to know whether learners are able to use the language in authentic (real-life) situations.

In the same perspective, these listening comprehension tests do not involve L1 and L2 students in activities that would enable them to use productive skills to convey meaning and complete tasks with real world rational. The results show that listening comprehension tests are constructed to assess only the learners' listening skills. During the exams, students are required to provide short answers or choose the correct answers among several others. In that sense, learners are not required to produce and create meaning by themselves.

Yet communicative language teaching advocates the integrative use of language abilities to allow learners to demonstrate their communicative competence. In the context of the evaluation of learners' listening skills, such an inclusion will allow students to build meaning from what they know. This can be done by asking students to listen to some passages and give their opinions or discuss an issue related to a current issue.

As said earlier, socio-constructivism emphasizes the relevance of including the social and cultural context of learners in the teaching and learning process. This theory contends that students learn best when they are involved in the real world or in authentic tasks, which help them develop their communicative competence in the target language. Also, communicative language testing under the psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic era focuses on the social roles of learners in real-world contexts and their engagement in specific communication contexts. This justifies the importance of using real-world tasks while testing learners' listening comprehension skills.

5.3 An Atomistic and Rigid Use of Language

An overall consideration of the collected data revealed that the listening comprehension tests for 1st and 2nd years lack reflective activities. Reflective activities require a little more depth of thought from the students. These activities help the learner to make use of his prior knowledge (schemata) to solve problems. In that sense, they are related to the learner's experience, as suggested by cognitive constructivism. These types of activities are often based on authentic situations.

Besides, these tests do not encourage the flexible use of the language; that is, the tests are not sufficiently authentic. Therefore, students have less chance to apply their linguistic knowledge during the listening comprehension tests to solve real-world problems. That is the reason why we believe these activities promote a rigid use of language.

In addition, they do not set the field for a holistic use of language. The holistic use of language allows learners to develop and use all their senses and multiple intelligences when gathering, processing, and recalling information (Gardner, 1999). Though the listening comprehension tests demand the learners to use the brain to produce responses, we wonder if they efficiently assess the holistic use of language of the learners.

The communicative competence of a learner is best evaluated when he/she is exposed to activities that can help him /her think and use language as a whole to produce meaning. That is why we argue that the situation in which learners are involved during listening comprehension tests favour an atomistic use of the language. This situation raises the following question: Which type of test can assess the holistic and flexible use of language by the students?

Piaget's cognitive constructivism theory puts emphasis on the importance of prior knowledge (schemata) in learning. It helps learners to assimilate and accommodate new information and keep this information for future use. In the listening comprehension tests, the use of integrative language skills and holistic use of language will help students activate their prior knowledge according to the demand of the task; this is likely to facilitate the evaluation of the communicative skill of the learner since he/she will have to employ several language skills.

6. Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the listening test submitted to 1st and 2nd years' learners revealed some weaknesses as the communicative testing principles are taken into account. These deficiencies call for reflections on the type of listening exams submitted to these 1st and 2nd years students on the basis of communicative language teaching principles. As discussed, the ultimate aim of language is communication. Consequently, in communicative teaching methods, learners are trained to build upon their communicative competence. This is why the type of listening tests they are given must focus on their communicative competence. In this way, teachers can assess whether or not learning has been achieved. That being said, I will concern myself to give some

suggestions for improving the listening tests submitted to 1st and 2nd year students at the Department of English in the UFHB according to the principles of communicative assessment methods. These suggestions are both theoretical and practical. They stand in three main points: an inclusion of more authentic activities based on the social and cultural context of learners, an inclusion of activities that allow an integrative use of language, a construction of listening comprehension tests based on the principle of "*unpredictable language input*" and "*creative language output*" and finally, some listening comprehension tests will be proposed for practical application of the above-mentioned suggestions.

First and foremost, an inclusion of authentic activities based on the social and cultural context of learners. Significantly, one way to improve the listening comprehension tests submitted to the 1st and 2nd year students at the Department of English of UFHB is to involve more authentic activities in the tests. It informs the aim of a communicative test which is to assess real-life skills. Moreover, communicative tests evaluate learners' abilities in a given social context. Therefore, the activities in the listening comprehension tests should be selected based on the social and cultural context of the learners, as suggested by the socio-constructivism theory of learning. This will enable the learners to make meaning from the activities they are involved in. Furthermore, this will also help learners demonstrate their listening skills in a meaningful context and in a communicative way.

In addition, another way of improving the listening tests is the inclusion of activities that allow an integrative use of language. In fact, communicative tests should require students to demonstrate their ability to use various language skills together as demanded in real communication. This includes skills related to communicative competence, namely linguistic, socio-linguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. In this case, the integrative test under the psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic period highlights the importance of integrating other skills in communicative tests. Therefore, I suggest that the listening comprehension activities of 1st and 2nd years should integrate tasks that enable students to apply more than one skill during the listening comprehension tests. As said earlier, listening is considered a receptive skill (Nunan, 2003). Consequently, to assess the learners' communicative skills, there is a need to use tasks that will involve students in using productive skills like writing.

Also, one way to improve the listening comprehension tests is to construct tests based on the idea of "*unpredictable language input*" and "*creative language output*", which is relevant to the communicative test (Brown, 2005). This means that the probability for people to always predict what other speakers will say is very low (unpredictable language input). That is the reason why learners need to be creative in how they respond to such situations (creative language output). Learners will need to be creative in how they use language in situations that are not predictable (situations they are not familiar with). In the same vein, Fulcher (2000: 489) states that "*in a communicative testing, learners should actually produce language*". Taking into consideration this idea will help learners construct their understanding about the situation in the tests. Further, it also enables

learners to adapt their knowledge about the new condition and satisfy the demands of the tests.

6.1 Practical Communicative Listening Comprehension Tests

In order to materialize the above suggestions in a listening comprehension test, we suggest the following communicative tests. Below are some listening comprehension tests of 1ˢᵗ and 2ⁿᵈ year students based on the above-mentioned suggestions.

Sample 1

Name: ……………………………………………………………………………
Date & Place of Birth: …………………………………………………………
TD: ………………………….
Students' Card Number: …………………………..

Listening Comprehension Test/ Final Session

Activity A:
Duration: 2 min

In the following passage, the numbered gaps indicate missing words. Against each number in the list below the passage, four choices are offered in columns lettered A to D. For each numbered gap. Choose from the options provided for that number the word that is most suitable to fill the gap.

Countries all over the world rely on their **-1-** resources for development. These resources vary from country to country. The discovery of crude oil **-2-** in any country is greeted with excitement because it is considered a valuable source of **-3-** for the government. Once it has been discovered by **-4-**, who would have been prospecting for it, an oil **-5-** is drilled until the petroleum reservoir is reached. Natural **-6-**, another valuable resource, may be found at the same time. **-7-** Oil is usually conveyed through a **-8-** directly to the **-9-** where it is processed. Here, petrol, diesel, kerosene, liquefied petroleum gas, and lubricants are produced for domestic and industrial use. Scientists have obtained other **-10-** substances from petroleum, for example, man-made fibres like nylon, which may be woven into beautiful fabrics for clothes.

	A	B	C	D
1.	rich	profitable	natural	vast
2.	reserves	stocks	preserves	stores
3.	savings	revenue	salary	accounts
4.	geologists	ecologist	salary	accounts
5.	rig	well	plant	hole
6.	liquid	gas	carbon	chemical
7.	undiluted	crude	unfinished	raw
8.	tunnel	tube	hose	pipeline
9.	purifier	factory	industry	refinery
10.	artificial	authentic	synthetic	inferior

Activity B:
- What is the passage about?
- What is the place of agriculture in the Ivorian economy? Explain this in twenty (20) lines

6.2 Explanation of the Listening Comprehension Test for L1 students

Firstly, the listening passage above is authentic and based on the social context of learners. This passage discusses the relevance of natural resources in the world. This is a current issue in many countries, including Côte d'Ivoire.

Moreover, the listening comprehension test above is also designed in light of communicative testing. The first activity in the test aims at assessing the listening skills of learners. In this section, learners are asked to listen carefully to the track and fill in the gaps as they listen to the track. In addition, learners have to provide answers to some open-ended questions. At this stage, they are required to use the writing skill after the first activity. For example, question 1 in activity B asks learners to give the main idea of the passage. Also, question 2 asks learners to show "*the place of agriculture in the Ivorian economy*". As explained above, this listening test assesses the learners' creativity. It enables them to convey meaning as they complete question 2 in activity B. Further, it is task-based, for it enables learners to accomplish specific tasks in the test.

From the above, we can say that the proposed L1 listening comprehension tests were constructed based on an authentic situation, which is one of the main criteria in the communicative test framework. Also, the tests help learners to integrate the writing skill when accomplishing the demands of the tests. Finally, as explained above, learners will use their intelligence and creativity to produce answers to the tests. This is due to the principle of "*unpredictable language input*" and "*creative language output*". From what has been said, it appears that the proposed listening tests are communicative, for they are constructed to assess the learners' communicative skills.

Sample 2
Transcribed listening passage

Duration: 2min: 58sec

"Hello, friends. How are you doing?
I am sure you have heard about the coronavirus. Do you know what it is?
Sure, you do!!!
Everyone is talking about it
I have looked up information that we know so far to explain it to you, although there are many doubts to be solved. COVID-19 is a disease caused by a virus which belongs to a family called coronavirus. This virus is the one that caused the pandemic in 2020. A pandemic is a new disease that spreads all over the world and affects many people. So far, we have observed that this virus can spread very easily. There are vectors like objects we have touched to sneezing or coughing. This can cause many people to get sick during the process of transmission. That is why the disease is spread worldwide.
As we know, the important thing is to look at ourselves and others. That is why many measures have been taken. To avoid the spread of the virus, it is advisable to follow some hygiene standards. First, wash your hands very often or use a hydro-alcoholic gel. Did you know that this way, the material that envelops the virus is broken? If this material is broken, the virus can't infect the cell. Secondly, be careful with the objects you touch and avoid touching your face. Also, keep a safe distance from others to protect yourself and them. If you use a mask, be careful not to touch it when you put it on. The mask should cover your mouth and nose. Furthermore, cough or sneeze into your elbow."
Source: www.youtube.com

6.3 Description of the Listening Passage

The text above is a transcribed listening passage which discusses issues on the COVID-19 pandemic that has disturbed the whole world from 2019 to date. According to the first suggestion, a communicative listening text should involve authentic situations. Authenticity is an essential aspect of communicative testing, for it describes the relationship between the text situation and the real world. The passage above focuses on social and cultural realities, for it discusses issues about the COVID-19 virus. Hence, it has an authentic dimension.

Name: ……………………………………………………………………………

Date & Place of Birth: ………………………………………………………………

TD: …………………………

Students' Card Number: …………………………….

Listening Comprehension Test / Final Session

Activity A

Listen carefully. Choose the correct answer.

1. To which family does COVID-19 belong?
    a. human virus,
    b. high fever virus,
    c. coronavirus,
    d. coughing virus.

2. What is a pandemic?
    a. is a new disease,
    b. is a worldwide disease,
    c. is coronavirus in the Abidjan,
    d. is a Chinese disease.

3. The coronavirus appeared in 2019.
    a. true,
    b. none,
    c. false,
    d. both a or b.

5. How is COVID-19 transmitted?
    a. when eating with others,
    b. mosquito bite,
    c. through unprotected sex,
    d. coughing and sneezing.

6. How can we prevent the spread of coronavirus?
   a. going to China for treatment,
   b. stand under a hot sun,
   c. travelling to France,
   d. none of the above.

Activity B
Listen carefully and answer the following questions.
1. Give a title to the passage,
2. How can we prevent the spread of the coronavirus?

Activity C
In 15 lines, explain how you experienced the lockdown period (period of confinement).
Explanation of the 1st year listening comprehension test
The listening comprehension test above is designed in the light of communicative language testing. The first activity in the test is meant to assess the listening skills of learners. In this section, learners are asked to listen carefully to the track and provide an answer to some multiple-choice questions to show what they have understood from the passage. Secondly, learners have to answer some open-ended questions. At this production stage, they are required to use their writing skill after listening to the audio passage. For example, activity C ask learners to explain how they experienced the lockdown period.

Also, the test above assesses the creativity of learners and enables them use language in a holistic manner. In fact, they will have to construct their understanding of the situation in the test by using their knowledge of the language. Also, they will adapt the language to the given situation by producing what they know.

The listening comprehension test above will also help them convey meaning when they accomplish the task in the test. In so doing, the test contains activities that will enable learners to use the language to express their thoughts and ideas about a given topic. In addition, the test is task-based because learners use the language to accomplish specific tasks in the test. For example, activity C in the test ask students to "explain how they experienced the lockdown period (confinement period)". In this case, learners will have to give a brief explanation of their experience. This will help them accomplish a task related to their realities (a real-life task).

7. Conclusion

This research on "an evaluation of listening comprehension tests from the communicative perspective: a case study" aimed at assessing the listening comprehension tests submitted to 1st and 2nd year students in the light of the communication language testing. The main question this research intended to answer is as follows: What is the level of communicativeness of the listening comprehension tests submitted to the L1 and L2

students at the Department of English? This main question calls for the following subsidiary questions: the first question is what are the characteristics of the listening comprehension tests submitted to the L1 and L2 students?; the second question is what are their strengths and weaknesses with regard to the principles of communicative language testing (CLT)?; and lastly how does one design listening comprehension tests for the L1 and L2 students that best reflect the principles of CLT?

The interpretation and discussion of these results revealed that there are flaws in the listening comprehension tests submitted by 1st and 2nd year students at the Department of English of UFHB with regard to the communication language testing. These flaws are as follows: an exclusive focus on learners' ability to discriminate among sounds and words, a limited replication of real-world, and an atomistic and rigid use of language. The results, therefore, provided the ground for making some suggestions, both theoretically and practically, to improve the situation. We made three suggestions. The first one is the inclusion of more authentic activities based on the social and cultural context of learners. The second suggestion puts emphasis on the inclusion of activities which enable learners to integrate other language skills. The next suggestion focuses on construction of listening comprehension tests based on the principle of "unpredictable language input" and "creative language output". Lastly, some practical communicative listening comprehension tests involving the above-mentioned suggestions were proposed.

The conduct of this study opens the door to future debates on the evaluation of listening comprehension tests regarding the principles of communicative testing in Ivorian universities, as future research might provide more insights into the implementation of more communicative language tests. For example, another research work could look into learners' difficulties with communicative tests in listening comprehension tests. Such a study can help with the adoption and application of communication language testing.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Test evaluation checklist (first draft)

Items	Yes	No
1. Are the items of the test task-based?		
2. Are the tasks of the test authentic (real life)?		
3. Do the tasks of the test allow an integrated use of language?		
4. Do the tasks ta of the test allow a flexible use of the language?		
5. Do the tasks of the test allow a holistic use of the language?		
6. Do the tasks of the test allow students to convey meaning?		
7. Do the tasks of the test develop learners' critical?		
8. Do the tasks of the test allow a creative use of language?		
9. Do the tasks of the test allow effective use of the language?		
10. Does the test help learners evaluate their communicative competence?		

Appendix B: Test evaluation checklist (final draft)

Items	Yes	No
1. Are the activities of the test task-based?		
2. Are the activities of the test authentic (real life)?		
3. Do the activities of the test allow an integrated use of language?		
4. Do the activities of the test allow a flexible use of the language?		
5. Do the activities of the test allow a holistic use of the language?		
6. Do the activities of the test allow students to convey meaning?		
7. Do the activities of the test allow a creative use of language?		

Appendix C: Listening comprehension test for the L1 students of the Department of English (Academic year 2020-2021)

Name: ……………………………………………………………………………

Date & Place of Birth: ……………………………………………………………

Student Card Number: …………………………………………**TD**…………

L1 Listening Comprehension/ Final Session 25 Th June 2021

A. Listen. Chose the correct answer. (6 pts)

Mother: a How **b** Where are you spending time after school this day? I know you go somewhere

Boy: Oh, I stop at a coffee shop.

Mother: I didn't know you **a** like **b** drink coffee.

Boy: Well, not so much, but I like to meet new people there.

Mother: Oh! Have you ever **a** spoken **b** talked to someone you don't know there?

Boy: Yeah. It's really interesting to meet **a** girls **b** strangers.

Mother: What do you talk about?

Boy: Lots of stuff. The weather, **a** music **b** sports, what's on TV …
Mother: That sounds fun. Have you ever met any nice girls there?
Boy: Um, did you **a** watch **b** see that movie yesterday? How was it?
Mother: Hey, don't try to change the topic. I asked about girls!

A. Listen. Choose the correct answer. (4 pts)
7**.** What topic does he open the conversation with?
 a. Siberia
 b. weather
 c. travel
 d. her hat

8. Which statement is correct?
 a. both girls are shy
 b. both girls think the guy is cute
 c. both girls never talk to strangers
 d. both girls want to meet the guy.

9**.** What is the new coach like?
 a. He is strict
 b. He is tough
 c. He is friendly
 d. We do not know.

10. What topic are they talking about today?
 a. religion
 b. music
 c. England
 d. movies

C. Listen. Complete the sentences using the words in the box. (5 pts)

a nervous	**b** strict	**c** history	**d** funny	**e** serious	**f** totally	**g** science

A: Have you seen the new **1** _____ teacher?
B: Not yet. I heard he makes students a little bit scared. What's he like?

A: Well, he looks really tough.
B: What do you mean by "thought"?

A: He has somewhat **2** _____ face. He never smiles.
B: Is he **3**_____ ?

A: Well, I thought so at first. He made me **4** _____ .
B: I can understand that.

A: But actually He's **5** _____ .
B: Really? That's great!

D. Listen to the interview and match each person with the correct cell phone description (5pts)

6. high school boy	a. silver, thick
7. child	b. pink without email
8. businessman	c. big, colourful
9. old man	d. black, with a small memory
10. high school girl	e. silver, thin
	f. silver, thin
	g. black, with a large memory
	h. shiny stickers
	i. big, gray
	j. black stickers

Appendix D: Listening comprehension test for the L2 students of the Department of English (Academic year 2020-2021)

Name: …………………………………………………………………………………………
Date & Place of Birth: …………………………………………………………………………
Student Card Number: ……………………………………………………**TD**…………

L2 Listening Comprehension/ Final Session 25 Th June 2021

A. Listen. Chose the correct answer. (6 pts)

Teacher: What sport do you like playing?
Boy: I like playing **a** baseball **b** basketball.

Teacher: So, are you good at it?
Boy: No, I'm **a** not so good **b** terrible at it.

Teacher: Oh yeah? Well, what are you good at?
Boy: Good at? Um, **a** singing **b** swimming.

Teacher: Oh. So then what do you think about that **a** club **b** team?
Boy: actually, I decided to join the **a** baseball **b** basketball club this year.

Teacher: Really? Why?

Boy: Well, because they practice **a** in **b** at that cool, new gym.

B. Listen. Choose the correct answer. (4 pts)

7. What's she at baking?
    a. cookies
    b. bread
    c. cakes
    d. pizza

8. Which club is she NOT in now?
    a. the music club
    b. bread
    c. the singing club
    d. the swimming club

9. What does he want to be?
    a. director
    b. a singer
    c. a drummer
    d. an actor

10. Which club is he in?
    a. the baseball club
    b. the running club
    c. the tennis club
    d. the book club

C. Listen. Complete the sentences using the words in the box. (5 pts)

a the best	**b** so	**c** sharp **d** better **e** big	**f** clear	**g** not

A: Have you decided which cell phone you want?

B: I'm not sure. There are so many choices! This black one looks good. The display is so **1** _____ .

A: Did you see this red one? I think it's **2** _____. And it has a large memory, which you'll find very useful.

B: But it's so **3** _____ ! I really want a lightweight one.

A: Ok, then this green one is 4 _____.

B: But the color green is **5** _____ great. How about that blue one?

D. Listen to the interview and match each person with the correct cell phone description (5pts)

6. high school boy	a. silver, thick
7. child	b. pink without email
8. businessman	c. big, colourful
9. old man	d. black, with a small memory
10. high school girl	e. silver, thin
	f. silver, thin
	g. black, with a large memory
	h. shiny stickers
	i. big, gray
	j. black stickers