

LECTURE 3: ITEMS – THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF TESTS

Assessment and International Exams in TEFL



THIS LECTURE OFFERS:

- partial listing of the options that are available in LT from which you can choose when you plan your tests
- advantages and disadvantages and points to consider when choosing these options
- MCQs, and possible problems with them

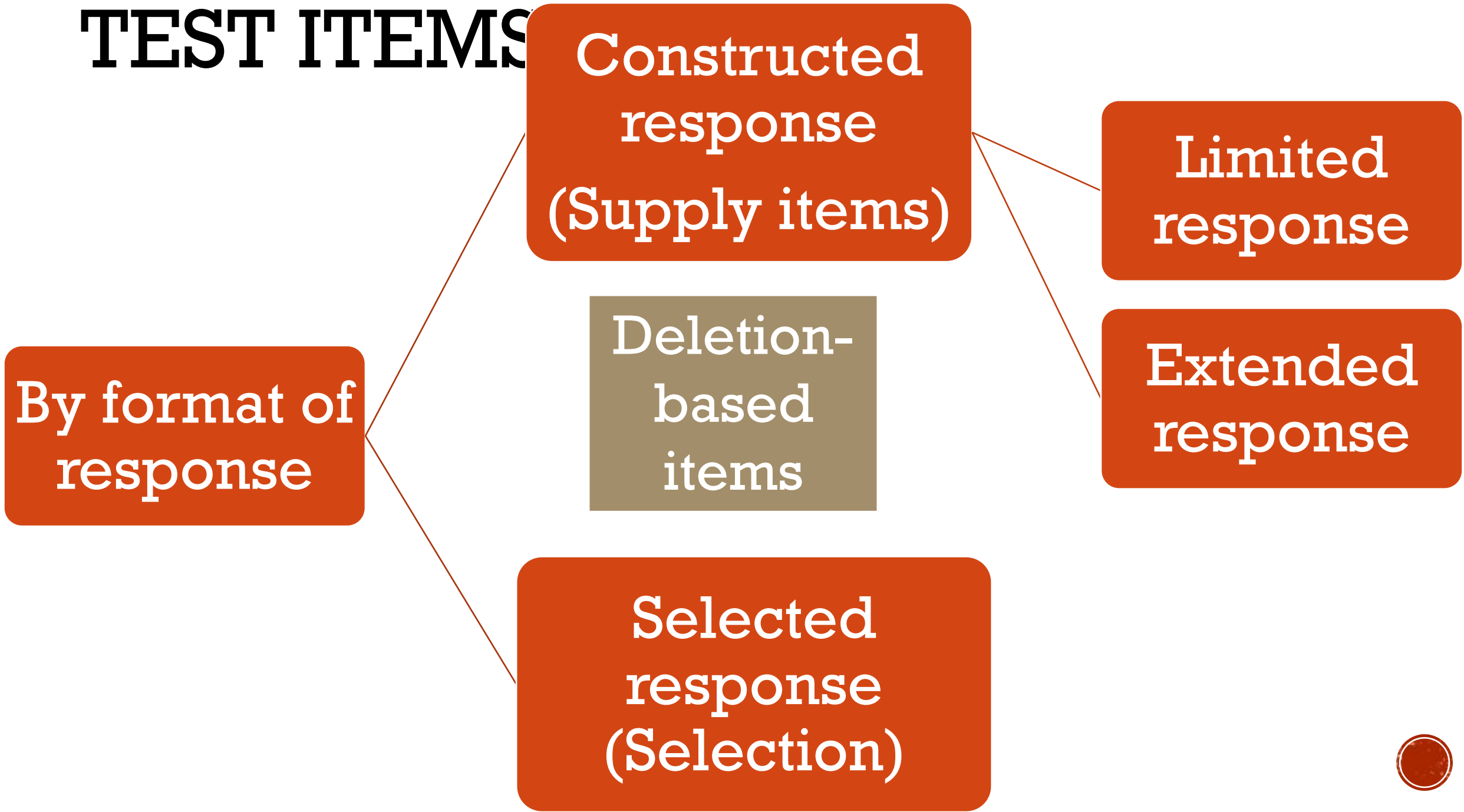


TASK FORMAT

- What a test task “looks like”, what sort of input test takers must produce
- Bachman: test method
- Bachman and Palmer: task type
- Brown and Hudson: item format
- Famularo, Shin: response format
- Alderson: test technique
- Coombe: test item



TEST ITEMS



CONSTRUCTED RESPONSE (SUPPLY) ITEMS

Limited response



LIMITED RESPONSE TASKS

- Short-answer questions, fill-in-the-blank , sentence writing or combination tasks, open-the brackets, an incomplete graphic organizer, an incomplete outline
- Can be passage-based or independent
- Assess a variety of language skills and subskills
- Require written response, ranging in length from 1 word to max. 1 sentence



LIMITED RESPONSE TASKS

Short-answer item:

- 1** What did Alice follow down the hole?
a rabbit

Fill-in-the-blank item (revised version of short-answer item above):

- 1** Alice followed a(n) rabbit down the hole.

Sentence combining item:

- 17** *Lions / not / eat / vegetables*
Lions do not eat vegetables.



SHORT ANSWER ITEM

Look at the story. You can use one, two or three words for your answers.

- Last week, Vicky went to the city center by bus. She met her friend Kate and they went to the cinema.
- How did Vicky get to the city center last week?

.....



WORD FORMATION

Use the word in capitals at the end of the line to form a word that fits the sentence.

- The results of the scientist's work have significance. **GLOBE**
- People made someremarks about my performance. **COMPLIMENT**



ERROR DETECTION

In each sentence there is either a spelling or punctuation error. Write the correctly spelled word or show the correct punctuation on your answer sheet.

- If we look at wood through a microscope we can see its made up of elongated cells.



KEY WORD SENTENCE TRANSFORMATION

Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence. Do not change the word given. You must use between **two and five words**, **including the word given**.

Could you please turn off your mobile phone?

- MIND
- Would your mobile phone off?



INFORMATION TRANSFER

Reading and Writing • Part 8

Questions 51 – 55

Read the invitation and the email.
Fill in the information in Louisa's notes.
For questions **51 – 55**, write the information on your answer sheet.

Come to an ice-skating party
on Saturday
at
Park Ice Rink
Starts at 1.30 p.m.
You won't need any money
but bring a warm sweater.
Let me know if you can come
by Thursday.
Sara

From: Carla
To: Louisa

Shall we go to Sara's ice-skating party together? My dad will take us in the car but we'll need to come back by bus. We'll drive to yours and get you at 12.30. Ring me this afternoon on my mobile (07816 212185) or after 6 p.m. at home (366387) to let me know.

Louisa's Notes
Ice-skating party

Person having party: Sara

Day: 51

Time: 52 p.m.

Take: 53

Travel there by: 54

Carla's evening phone number: 55



DELETION-BASED TASKS:

CLOZE TESTS

■ *Fixed Deletion Cloze (n = 7)*

Studying black bears

After years studying North America's black bears in the (0) way, wildlife biologist Luke Robertson felt no closer to understanding the creatures. He realised that he had to (1) their trust. Abandoning scientific detachment, he (2) the daring step of forming relationships (3) the animals, bringing them food to (4) their acceptance. The insight this has (5) him into their behaviour has allowed (6) to dispel certain myths about bears.



RATIONAL DELETION CLOZE

After years studying North America's black bears in the (0) way, wildlife biologist Luke Robertson felt no closer to understanding the creatures. He realised that he had to (1) their trust. Abandoning scientific detachment, he took the daring step of forming relationships with the animals, bringing them food to gain their acceptance.

The (2) this has given him into their behaviour has allowed him to dispel certain myths about bears. (3) to popular belief, he contends that bears do not (4) as much for fruit as previously supposed. He also (5) claims that they are ferocious. He says that people should not be (6) by behaviour such as swatting paws on the ground, as this is a defensive, rather than an aggressive, act.



TASK FORMAT?

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task. Write about the following topic:

Some people believe that children are given too much free time. They feel that this time should be used to do more school work.

How do you think children should spend their free time?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least **250 words**.



CONSTRUCTED RESPONSE (SUPPLY) ITEMS

Extended response



EXTENDED RESPONSE

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task. Write about the following topic:

Some people believe that children are given too much free time. They feel that this time should be used to do more school work. How do you think children should spend their free time?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.



OTHER EXTENDED RESPONSE TASKS

- **Written:** recall tasks, written summaries, essays and compositions, full size research papers.
- **Spoken:** short or lengthy monologues on a given topic, a speech, a presentation, group oral interview, roleplay,



SELECTED-RESP ONSE ITEMS



TRUE / FALSE / NOT GIVEN

- TFNs: *True/False, yes/no, correct/incorrect, right/wrong, or fact/opinion.*

Advantages?? Disadvantages??

- Allow for testing large amounts of content in lesser time
- Ease of scoring (objective items)
- They are easy! ! It is difficult to discriminate btw Sts who know the material and students who do not
- If NG option not included, 50% guessing factor
- To increase reliability, must be a sufficient amount on the test



TRUE / FALSE / NOT GIVEN

- Write items that test meaning rather than trivial detail.
- Qs should be at lower level of language difficulty than the text
- Consider the effects of background knowl
- Qs should appear in same order as text
- Paraphrase questions, avoid verbatim matching
- Avoid 'absoluteness' cues, answer patterns
- Rather have Sts circle TFNs, than write letters



Do the following statements agree with the information in the text? Mark them:

True if the statement agrees with the text

False if the statement does not agree with the text

Not Given if there is no information about this in the text

Chilies

Chilies originate in South America and have been eaten for at least 9,500 years. Organised cultivation began around 5,400 BC. Christopher Columbus was the first European to encounter chilies, when he landed on the island of Hispaniola in 1492. He thought it was a type of pepper and called it the “red pepper”, a name still used today. After their introduction to Europe they were an immediate sensation and were quickly incorporated into the diet. From there they spread to Africa, India and East Asia.

The reason for the chili’s “hotness” lies in a chemical called Capsaisin. Capsaisin causes temporary irritation to the trigeminal cells, which are the pain receptors in the mouth, nose and throat. After the pain messages are transmitted to the brain, endorphins, natural pain killers, are released and these not only kill the pain but give the chili eater a short lived natural high. Other side effects include: an increased heart rate, a running nose and increased salivation and sweating, which can have a cooling effect in hot climates.

Chilies originate in South America and have been eaten for at least 9,500 years.

- 1. Chilies come from South America.**
- 2. People began eating Chilies in the last few centuries.**
- 3. South Americans were the first people to start eating Chilies.**
- 4. South Americans are the only nation who have a special loving for Chilies.**



MATCHING

- Fairly easy to construct but may be a matter of logic and elimination
- Include more options than blanks to reduce the guessing factor
- Can take many forms and formats:
 - Connect a list of words to list of pictures
 - Connect synonyms from two word lists
 - Select a word from a word bank
 - Passage-based: multiple-matching

<http://www.flo-joe.co.uk/cae/students/tests/>



MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

53 There ___ four chairs in the kitchen.

A has

B have

C is

D are

54 Eggs come ___ chickens.

A from

B with

C inside

D for



MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Advantages

- Objective: Ease of scoring
- Most commonly used format: known to teachers and students at various levels
- No skill contamination
- Cost-effective and practical

Disadvantages

- Lack authenticity, cannot be used to test language as communication
- Very often aimed only at recall and recognition
- Guessing factor is strong!
- Challenging and time consuming to create



COMMON ITEM PROBLEMS

- Cueing
- 3 for 1 Split
- Impurity
- Subsuming
- Apples and Oranges
- Unparalleled options
- Gender representation
- Stereotypes
- Inflammatory tone
- Double keys
- No key
- Implausibility
- Outside or Background knowledge
- Trickiness
- Insensitivity
- Inappropriate terminology



CUEING

- within an item or within the test

When you write “for deposit only” on a check, you are probably going to

_____.

- a. cash a check
- b. deposit money
- c. transfer funds
- d. open an account



3 FOR 1 SPLIT

- 3 distractors are parallel; the 4th is not (a.k.a. “odd man out”)

The hotel _____ an ad in the newspaper to recruit new employees.

- placing
- placed
- to place
- placement



IMPURITY

- Items that test more than one thing
- I never knew _____.
 - a. had the boys gone
 - b. the boys have gone
 - c. have the boys gone
 - d. the boys had gone



SUBSUMING

John: We need to buy some new office furniture.

Mike: Ok, I'll call the supply company.

John: Just don't get the metal ones, please!

What will Mike order?

- a. metal desks
- b. comfortable chairs
- c. office furniture



APPLES AND ORANGES

- Response options have no relation to one another or are 2 for 2 split
- Nowadays people use mobile phones

- a. frequently
- b. seldom
- c. in their cars
- d. for emergency purposes



UNPARALLELED OPTIONS

- Response options are not parallel in
 - length
 - grammar
- How do most Russians go to work?
 - a. By bus.
 - b. Go by taxi.
 - c. Most of them drive.
 - d. Walk.



STEREOTYPES

- Test materials should avoid language that fosters stereotypes.
- Latifa went downtown _____ pick up some soul food.

- a) so
- b) to
- c) for
- d) ---



INFLAMMATORY TONE

- Material that may have a negative emotional impact on Ss should be avoided.
- _____ many American soldiers in the Arabian Gulf right now.
 - a) There are
 - b) There is
 - c) There were
 - d) There have been



INSENSITIVITY

- Items should not be shocking or upsetting to test takers.
- Four people _____ in three serious car accidents on Sheikh Zayed Road yesterday.
 - a) were killed
 - b) killed
 - c) are killed
 - d) to kill



DOUBLE KEYS

- More than one response option is keyable.

I apologize for before.

- a. Not writing
- b. Not write
- c. Not having written
- d. Not to be writing



NO KEY

- Care should be taken to include a correct answer in response options.
- This is the restaurant _____ I told you about yesterday.
 - a) what
 - b) why
 - c) where
 - d) how



IMPLAUSIBILITY

- Ss can improve 'monkey score' by eliminating absurd or giveaway distractors
- The Olympics were held in _____ in 2004.
 - a. Athens
 - b. Beijing
 - c. Seoul
 - d. Disneyland



OUTSIDE/BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

- Ss are able to answer the question based on outside or background knowledge.
- The weather in Siberia is _____ hot and sunny.
 - a. often
 - b. never
 - c. sometimes
 - d. rarely



TRICKINESS

- Focus on points that are notoriously confusing even for native speakers.
- Smoking has a bad _____ on health.
 - a. effect
 - b. affect
 - c. affliction
 - d. effectiveness



INAPPROPRIATE TERMINOLOGY

- Avoid politically incorrect terminology
- Crippled children can study a variety of different _____ at the new school.
 - a. teachers
 - b. students
 - c. subjects
 - d. methods



MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQS)

- Question should be clearly in stem
- Four options optimal, one must be unambiguous answer.
Others = distractors which attract Ss
- All response options are parallel (same length, difficulty level)
- Avoid the longest answer is the correct one – rule-of-thumb
- Avoid: “all of the above”, never, always, absurd or giveaway distractors, extraneous cues, items that presuppose correct answer to previous item.
- Avoid patterns: AAABBBCCCAAABBBCCC



Parallel in length

- The most general cause of low individual incomes in the United States is:
 - a) lack of valuable productive services to sell.
 - b) unwillingness to work.
 - c) automation.
 - d) inflation.



- Move recurring information in response options to the stem.

In national elections in the United States the President is officially:

- a) chosen by the people.
 - b) chosen by members of Congress.
 - c) chosen by the House of Representatives.
 - d) chosen by the Electoral College."
- If the same words appear in all response options, take these words out of the response options and put them in the stem.



CONCLUSIONS

- Teachers should be aware of the implications for English language learners of different test formats.
- Task format should be linked to tested constructs, fall in line with the desired purpose and outcome.
- The type of test impacts a student's ability to demonstrate his or her language ability.

