

Behavioral Objectives and Foreign Language Teaching and Testing

Pisit Puangmalee

Generally speaking, teaching consists of four basic components: objectives, teaching materials, methods of teaching and evaluation. Before a teacher starts planning a lesson, he should first set the objectives for the course. Therefore he needs to establish very clearly what he should be trying to get his students to achieve. Then he can select the material and choose the methods of teaching appropriate to suit the objective. Finally he needs to assess whether or not the student has achieved what he is expected to acquire at the end of the instructional period or course. Since objectives are essential in planning learning opportunities, they should be explicitly and specifically stated so that both teachers and students know what they are to do throughout the course.

Recently there has been a shift of emphasis among educationalists and teachers. They are becoming increasingly interested in the end product of education rather than the process of education itself. The reason for this is that as believed by educators nowadays, education can be described as a process which is intended to bring about certain desirable changes in the behavior of the student, that is to say, changes in what they think, or the way they act or feel. Consequently, instructional objectives should be stated in terms of student performance.

Behavioral objectives are increasingly accepted as the key to better instruction and more productive learning. Let us consider the two objectives below.

- A. The student will have a good understanding of the letters of the alphabet.
- B. The student will be able to pronounce the names of the letters of the alphabet.

We can see that Statement B is more explicit than Statement A. It tells us what specifically the student will be able to do : to pronounce the name of the letter. Statement A just tells us that the student will have a good understanding of the alphabet. Statement A is vague. The term "a good understanding" can mean different things to different people. Does it mean that the student will be able to pronounce correctly; or that he will be able to write the letter down; or again that he will be able to identify the names of the letters in a given word?

Behavioral objectives help improve the quality of education in many ways. Firstly, they can give each learning activity a purpose. Students see exactly what they are expected to do and understand why they are asked to do it. Behavioral objectives are equally important for teachers, for unless a teacher knows exactly where he is going and what he expects from the students, it is impossible to tell how much progress his class is making and when, if ever, they will achieve the goal set for them. Furthermore, without clearly stated objectives, it is impossible to construct valid tests to measure whether the desired learning has actually taken place. Secondly, they are useful in communicating clearly to parents, administrators and other interested members of the community the result of the instruction offered in school. In a time when support for foreign language education is vitally needed, it is essential that teachers hold themselves accountable for providing rewarding experiences to all their students as well as specific indications of their accomplishments—both of which are allowed through the proper use of behavioral objectives

What is a behavioral objective?

A behavioral objective is a statement indicating what the student should be able to do as a result of the learning opportunities presented. It not only describes what the student is to do but also explains the purpose of the achievement, the conditions under which it will occur and how it will be evaluated. In other words, a behavioral objective contains four parts: purpose, student behavior, conditions and criterion. For example, the behavioral objectives of a language lesson might be written like this:

(Purpose) To develop speaking skill ; to speak without using notes ; to develop pronunciation ; and to apply grammatical knowledge in spoken communication. (Student Behavior) the student is required to give a two-minute speech on a topic of his own choice, (Conditions) No notes can be used during the class presentation and the student will be graded on pronunciation, fluency and grammatical accuracy. (Criteria) No more than five major errors in grammar and pronunciation will be allowed in order to pass.

Formal behavioral objectives, as seen above, are stated in four parts. They place the emphasis on the student's achievement, which is evaluated in terms of observable and predictable performance. In foreign language learning, the behavior to be evaluated can often be specified very precisely: The students will recite memorized materials, conjugate verbs, name objects in the foreign language, and so on. These objectives, which represent simpler and more elementary aspects of language, can be described in terms of formal behavioral objectives. However, it is much more difficult to specify, with precision, types of behavior involving free composition or conversation, because the teacher cannot predict which sentences the student will choose, or which vocabulary items he will use. Therefore another kind

of objective is needed. That is an open-ended or expressive behavioral objective. It contains a purpose and a statement of student behavior in terms of performance, but the conditions may be less precise and the criterion might be simply whether or not the desired behavior has occurred. Open-ended or expressive behavioral objectives are appropriate for higher levels of language instruction. By ranging student behavior from simpler to more complex the teacher is able to determine which forms of behavior lend themselves to formal and which to expressive objectives.

According to Bloom's classification, the goals of language instruction can be divided into two areas: subject-matter goals and affective goals. Subject-matter goals refer to what is being taught: the language skills, the grammar, the vocabulary, the culture, and the literature. For instance, can the student recognize the verb tenses?; can he understand a conversation in the foreign language?; etc. These types of subject matter goals involve the two domains of Bloom's taxonomy: the cognitive domain and psychomotor domain. The cognitive domain includes behavior which requires knowledge, understanding and intellectual skills while the psychomotor domain includes behavior which requires physical activities such as sound production, copying sentences, gestures, etc. Valette and Disick grade the behavior in subject-matter goals into five levels ranging from simpler to more complex behavior. They are mechanical skills, knowledge, transfer, communication, criticism. Affective goals on the other hand refer to the student's attitudes and feelings. Does the student pay attention in class? Does he participate in discussion? These are considered affective behaviors which are likewise subdivided into five levels of achievement by Valette and Disick. These are receptivity, responsiveness, appreciation, internalization, and characterization. It is important that teachers should include both subject-matter goals and affective goals in writing objectives for their teaching.

The five areas of behavior of the taxonomy of the subject-matter goals coincide with those of the taxonomy of affective goals. The student's progress in mastering the foreign language is frequently accompanied by a growing positive attitude toward foreign language instruction and toward the value of knowing another language. Conversely, if a student experiences frustration in his efforts to learn another language, he loses interest, becomes less tolerant and exhibits little attentiveness.

How can behavioral objectives be evaluated in FL teaching ?

Since behavioral objectives emphasize the learner's achievements, they should be evaluated in terms of observable behavior. The student has to demonstrate the ability he has acquired in FL learning. Behavior for evaluating the student achievement can be either verbal or non-verbal behavior. When verbal behavior is to be evaluated, the student is required to demonstrate ability by speaking or writing in the foreign language. For example, to demonstrate speaking skill, the

student may recite a dialog he has learnt or give a talk in the foreign language. The performance will be graded or scored according to the criteria set by the teacher. If the behavior is to be non-verbal, the student may be asked to demonstrate his abilities by producing non-verbal behavior which might be actions or gestures in response to foreign language cues. For example, in demonstrating the ability to understand spoken language, the student is asked to carry out a request or command in the foreign language, or to match a picture with the correct description of that picture.

In the area of subject-matter goals, four primary skills are involved in FL learning, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each of the skills involves behavior ranging from very elementary or basic behavior to more complex.

Listening Skills

In the area of listening skills, the teacher is primarily concerned with the student's understanding of spoken language. The behavior involved is internal. At the elementary stage, the student perceives meaningful differences between his native language and the foreign language. He can discriminate between two or more words in foreign language utterances on the basis of sounds he hears. He understands the meaning of words and sentences he has been taught. He can respond to familiar commands, match utterances with appropriate pictures, and give a translation of a sentence he hears. Certain tests can be conducted to assess these skills:

1. Have the student listen to a series of words and distinguish between Thai and English words. If the word you hear is in Thai, underline "Thai", if in English, underline "English".

1 desk answer sheet: 1 Thai English
2 ชานชาลา answer sheet: 2 Thai English

2. Tick the appropriate box according to whether the paired words you hear are the same or different.

	same	different
1 bus buzz		✓
2 ship ship	✓	

3. When shown a picture or flashcard, tick the letter of the sentence that correctly describes it.

A picture of boys playing football.

Tape a. The boys are working in the field. b. The boys are playing football.

Answer sheet a. ✓ b.

At a more advanced level, students are required to produce more complex behavior which involves comprehension and intellectual analysis.

e.g. Listen to the following sentences and tick the appropriate box to indicate if the sentence you hear is active or passive.

The man cut the tree down. The house was blown down by the wind.

or, Listen to the following passage (or dialog) and indicate by writing “yes” or “no” whether each of statements which follow it may be logically implied from the information given.

Speaking Skills

Speaking involves active participation on the part of the student. Speaking behavior is usually developed in conjunction with listening behavior. In this area, we can evaluate the achievement by means of simple behavior -- repetition of words, sentences, dialogs -- or more complex behavior involving original or creative thinking.

1. Repeat after the tape the words you hear. (scored on pronunciation accuracy)
2. Repeat after the tape the sentence you hear. (scored on pronunciation accuracy)
3. Respond to a picture or question with the appropriate word or expression. (weather, seasons, colours, etc.)
4. When presented with a structure and a cue word, respond by incorporating the cue word into the pattern. (pattern drill)
5. Communicate original thoughts orally--speak for 10 minutes on a topic of your or your teacher's choice.
6. Act out a situation in which you display a particular emotion. (anger, impatience, frustration)

Reading Skills

Reading skills do not only refer to the ability of the student to perceive and understand what is written or printed. Skills involved in reading can be any of the following. The student can distinguish sound and symbol correspondence in the foreign language. He can understand the meaning of a familiar statement he reads. At a higher level of reading, the student can understand recombinations of vocabulary and structures he has learnt. He can read with comprehension material containing unfamiliar cognates and new vocabulary or structural items. Finally, he can make judgements with regard to the expression and style of an author.

1. Underline the words whose vowels are different from those of the other two.

1 hill 2 night 3 kite Answer sheet : 1

2. Circle the word that doesn't rhyme with other words.

1 time 2 rim 3 climb Answer sheet : 2

3. Match the words or sentences on the left with an appropriate picture on the right (e.g. with clocks, using objects, adjectives, comparisons, numbers and so on)
4. Circle the Thai equivalent that corresponds with the underlined English words.
He is fond of music.
a. รั้ (loves) b. ชอบ (likes) c. เล่น (plays)
5. Write the letter of the choice that most appropriately completes the sentence.
John was.....this morning because his car broke down on the way to work.
a. late b. lazy c. happy
6. Answer the following short-answer or multiple-choice questions on a story, novel, play, essay, article you have read.
7. List three important ideas, facts, or events from material read.
8. Read as rapidly as you can with understanding during the allotted time and cross out the nonsense words that have been inserted in the passage.
9. Read as rapidly as you can for.....minutes. Answer the multiple-choice questions on the text read.
10. Write "yes" or "no" to indicate if the following statement may logically be implied from the passage read.
Example : Two speakers discuss what they will order for lunch.
Statement: a. The speakers are in a restaurant.
 b. It is early in the morning.

Writing Skills

Writing skills usually involve external behavior on the part of students. All activities that require writing in the foreign language fall into this area. Indirect measures of writing ability, however, may also be used in foreign language testing because of their convenience from the point of view of scoring. With an item such as "*I'll take this/these two shirts.*" students are being tested on whether they know which of the two forms to write in order to complete the sentence correctly. Such an item is quite similar to one in which the student would actually write the missing word.
(Example : Fill in the blank). Production of accurate written language is highly complex and demanding.

1. Look at the following sentences and copy them.
2. Write the dialog, sentences, or poem you have memorized.

3. Rewrite the sentence, substituting the words in the parentheses for those underlined in the sentence.
Example : Do you know where the *bus terminal* is? (airport)
4. In the blank, write the verb in the parentheses in the appropriate tense to complete the statement.
Julia.....to the theater last week. (go)
5. Rewrite the following sentences using the cue word.
They speak English fluently. (She)
6. Rewrite the following paragraph, changing all nouns and pronouns from singular to plural and making all other necessary agreements.
7. Write a narrative of the action in the cartoon series you see.
8. Write a paragraph, composition, dialog on a topic of your own or your instructor's choice (friends, family, hobbies special interest, etc.)
9. Write an essay that argues for a particular point of view (politics, morality, education.)
10. Change the tone of a given paragraph (formal into informal, ironic to factual.)

As seen above, the writing skills which can be evaluated range from very basic to quite complex, the latter requiring a large measure of understanding and intellectual thought.

Evaluating Affective Goals for Behavioral Objectives in Foreign Language Teaching

Teachers who are engaged in teaching a foreign language should be aware of the goals pertaining to the affective domain as well. Attitudes towards FL learning develop in relation to the achievement the student has made during the learning period. The affective goals can be evaluated in two ways : formally or informally. Formal evaluation can be carried out by having the student fill out questionnaires on what he feels about the course. However, this one measure may not always be sufficient. Frequently, students will tend to provide answers they think their teacher wants, rather than those that truly reflect their feelings. For this reason, it is advisable to combine anonymous student questionnaires with a variety of other evaluation techniques. Here informal evaluation comes into play. This can be carried out in a variety of ways—through teacher observation, recording enrollment figures and attrition rate. The teacher can observe the students to determine his degree of interest, participation, attentiveness, etc., both in and out of class.

Conclusion

In many ways, performance or behavioral objectives offer the possibility of improving the quality of education. It must be noted that behavioral objectives have their own limitations. They do not themselves provide a panacea for the problems related to language teaching. If they are to contribute substantially to the improvement of instruction, they should be wisely used.

Bibliography

1. Valette, Rebecca M. and Disick Renee S. : Modern Language Performance Objectives and Individualization.
2. Valette, Rebecca M. : Modern Language Testing
3. Craik, Mary B. : Behavioral Objective in Curriculum Development
4. Nicholls, Audrey & Nicholls, Howard : Developing Curriculum
5. Cohen, Arthur M. : Toward the Measurable Objectives
6. Esbensen, Thoswald : Writing Instructional Objectives
7. ภาษาสร้างสรรค์ Vol. VII, March 1977.