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Title: Teaching and testing the language skills of first language speakers

Abstract:

The goals of first language teaching are significantly different from those of second language teaching. In the first language context, children already have a well-developed language system in place. They have good knowledge of the everyday vocabulary and can automatically recall much of it. They can choose words appropriate to a particular context. However, they may lack more formal language. Regarding speaking skills, they can speak language fluently and understand it very well. But it may not be the standard variety and may be limited to colloquial/informal register. Their listening skills are good, and they can use those skills to develop language. Regarding reading, if they can decode words, they will know the meaning of words and sentences. However, they may not be able to skim, scan or read for detail. They are also likely to have problems with writing.

In this talk, I argue that, in view of these conditions, the first language teaching should mainly focus on two domains – communication skills on one hand and language and literature on the other. The former would include effortless expression in a variety of contexts, control over different registers and coherent writing. The latter would include scientific study of language, creativity and sensitivity. This paper also makes some suggestions regarding testing in the first language context. In particular, it focuses on achieving beneficial backwash and designing accurate tests.