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Precision Language Teaching as the Realization of Dynamic Alternative Assessment in Language Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Precision teaching involves constant monitoring of each individual learner's advancement and thus represents a responsive and accountable teaching. Dynamic and alternative assessments challenge the mainstream assessment and propose the integration of teaching and assessment. The present study is an attempt to show how the tenets of alternative and dynamic assessments are compatible with and are realized in a precision teaching approach to classroom practices. Through precision teaching data gathered from learners are employed to enhance their learning through providing immediate feedback, and this is how teaching, learning and assessment come together. This paper is an attempt to demonstrate to what extent an integrated Precision Language Teaching (PLT) satisfies recent contentions made by those who propose dynamic and alternative language assessments as more effective alternatives to traditional discrete language assessment through taking formulaic expressions as the main building blocks of language.

Keywords: *precision teaching, alternative assessment, dynamic assessment, Precision Language Teaching (PLT), formulaic expressions.*

INTRODUCTION

Alternative assessment and precision teaching have developed quite independently from each other despite their highly close similarities they represent in their assumptions about the nature and purpose of assessment. Alternative assessment spreads its boundaries to include language assessment and precision teaching lends itself to language teaching and learning through close monitoring of learners' linguistic behavior. The purpose of the present study is to indicate how precision teaching and alternative assessment are compatible and can be employed to enhance the performance of language learners. Precision Language Teaching (PLT) is proposed as the realization of integration of PT and alternative language assessment and it is contended that PLT results in fluency, accuracy, and higher proficiency levels in language learners.

Precision Teaching

Precision teaching is defined as "basing educational decisions on changes in continuous self-monitored performance frequencies displayed on standard celebration charts" (Lindley, 1992). According to Kessissoglou and Farrell (1995) precision teaching in essence is aimed at providing a structured method in order to record learners' progress on a daily basis and is considered to be a behavioral approach, since it puts emphasis on the prominence of precise recording, immediate reinforcement, and feedback. The assumption is that when the learner is not being successful in learning one task, what needs to be examined is the teaching practiced by the teacher as potential source of problem prior to condemning the child for his/her inability to learn (Raybould & Solity, 1982). According to Raybould and Solity (1982) precision teaching is a strategy to help us determine what "teaches best" and teachers can be open to their choosing teaching approaches. According to Neal (1981) precision teaching entails an emphasis on direct measurement of observable behavior and the preparation of formative evaluations for learners within the instructional environment. Based on this view teaching strategies vary according to the level of progress towards predetermined instructional objectives. The argument is that despite its behavioral affiliations, precision teaching easily lends itself to modern views in language teaching and assessment which are emphasizing the value of integrating teaching and assessment and thus a dynamic

approach to assessment. Precision teaching fulfills the good job of turning assessment as a judicial tool used in stigmatizing learners into the driving force and a supportive facility behind teaching and learning practices. The promising aspects of precision teaching mentioned by Kessissoglou and Farrell (1995) are that learners highly appreciate immediate and visible feedbacks they receive through minute tests. On the other hand it supplies teachers with immediate information to see if their program is being successfully implemented and whether adjustments need to be done either in regard to the methods employed in teaching or the decided targets and thus a classroom research or what Norris Haring and colleagues (1978, cited in Raybound & Solity, 1988) named the Fourth R, i.e., research in the classroom. On the other hand precision teaching according to Lindsley (1990, cited in Binder, 1990) provides learners and teachers with scientific involvement. This is compatible with what Binder and Witkins (1990, cited in Sinn, 2007) maintain about the scientific nature of PT as a way to gather document in order to make "robust" and "valid" decisions for progress. According to Pocock, Foster, and MacEwan (2010), as an indispensible part of precision teaching, celeration charts developed by Lindsley (1971) provides teachers and learners with familiar, standardized data and allows the comparison of one individual with others. They further maintain that these charts outline the frequency of correct and incorrect performances across days and usually represent a goal or performance aim in order to indicate the rate of performance that the person is planning to achieve. Employing such charts highly resembles single-subject research through which the performance of each individual at the presence and absence of a treatment is evaluated. What is of critical importance is the fact that according to Lindsley (1971, cited in Neal, 1981) precision teaching is not a teaching method, but rather it represents a set of procedures to be employed together with any teaching method or a systematic method to be employed in evaluating teaching methods (Roberts & Norwich, 2010). The other fact is that according to Neal (1981) although precision teaching has been mainly applied to handicapped, disturbed or retarded populations, its procedures can be adapted to meet the instructional needs of any child engaged in any type of curriculum. Considering the long held belief that teaching needs to be geared to each learner's level of proficiency, based on Pienemann's (2004) processability theory, precision teaching serves the good job of differentiating between learners based on their ability and developmental stage in order to help them achieve their potential higher proficiency levels through the support of their teachers. Neal (1981) also maintain that precision teaching differentiates between learners based on their abilities and provides teachers with the tools to determine their learners' instructional level and allows learners to progress at their own rate to the higher stages in a predetermined curriculum sequence. This is quite compatible with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, since through precision teaching each learner's potential level of development is attempted by teachers as more knowledgeable others (Ellis, 1997) through scaffolding learners by providing them with constant feedback. Such individualistic nature of precision teaching calls for data-based research procedure which takes into account idiosyncrasies and does not level out differences in order to reach statistical precisions. The research method which seems to best serve this individualism seems to be a single-subject design research. Precision teaching helps teachers to collect data from learners on a daily-basis in order to meet each learner's instructional needs (Neal, 1981). Despite its behavioristic origins, PT emphasizes the encouraging role of errors as integral part of learning process and as learning opportunities (Binder & Watkins, 1990).

Dynamic/Alternative Assessment

What is the main distinctive factor which distinguishes dynamic assessment from other conventional views of assessment and teaching is the idea that they should not be considered as separate processes and should be fully integrated. Such integration results in interventions in assessment procedures in an attempt to determine individuals' abilities and to help them achieve higher levels of performance. Such integration of teaching and assessment is quite in keeping with vygotsky's understanding of development (Poehner, 2008). Haywood and Lidz (2007) maintain that what is the major component of definitions provided so far for Dynamic Assessment is “active intervention by examiners and assessment of examinee’s response to intervention” (p. 1). Haywood and Tzuriel (2002, cited in Haywood and Lidz, 2007, p. 2) define dynamic assessment as “a subset of interactive assessment that includes deliberate and planned meditational teaching and the assessment of the effects of that teaching on subsequent performance” (p. 2). Since dynamic assessment can be considered as

a subcomponent of alternative assessment from now on the term alternative assessment will be employed to refer to both concepts.

Janisch, Liu and Akrofi (2007, p. 222) enumerate the distinguishing characteristics of alternative assessment when they maintain that alternative assessment: happens in the classroom through which teachers are involved in making decisions in regard to measures employed; sees to learning as a constructivist activity whose outcome is determined by student, the text, and the context; and finally it considers learning processes on a par with resulting products.

The characteristic of alternative assessment paradigm according to Buhagiar (2007) are that: assessment should be based on 'holistic learning' and 'qualitative understanding'; assessment is constructive in that rather than penalizing learners it supports them by putting emphasis on how much one student has achieved compared to himself/herself rather than compared to others or based on certain predetermined criteria; the goal of assessment has shifted from 'categorizing' students for the sake of assigning them into predetermined educational programs to adjusting educational programs to each individual student's needs and to joining learners together to benefit from mutual learning experiences; assessment is not a scientific or objective activity anymore, rather from a postmodern perspective which emphasizes 'multiple realities', 'subjectivity' and 'knowledge construction', it is considered as an 'inexact matter'. Such postmodern view results in a shift from psychometrical assessment to the educational model and dispenses with unquestionable position of 'scientific knowledge'. Apart from our attempts to adjust measuring instruments, it is still not possible to determine what is inside a student's head. Assessment can instead only let us know what the students are able to do in particular situations; assessment cannot represent an exact science, since constructs are highly complex and multidimensional, and due to the complexity of the interaction of student, task, and context, it is impossible to decide what students can do in other situations; the denial of the existence of a 'true score' results in a 'reconceptualization' rather than prohibition of tests and examinations in assessment, based on constructivist theories, in addition to indicating what students know and are able to do, tests facilitate good learning, on the other hand tests need to be placed in the service of learning (Glaser (1990, cited in Buhagiar, 2007); according to this new paradigm decisions made based on assessments have consequences on human life. Since students are the most defenseless in this regard, it seems vital to always make an effort in gaining reliable information prior to making important decisions that can impact students' lives. What is more once the information is obtained, its privacy must be guaranteed, its decision-making limitations acknowledged, and it must never be used as a way to belittle or deride a student.

Hamayan (1995) enumerate two reasons for the current call for alternative assessments. The fist factor pertains to the close relationship between assessment and both teaching and learning. The second factor is the evolving nature of the educational goals, directed at higher standards and more sophisticated goals. More holistic and integrative views of language and the push toward the development of higher order skills have given rise to alternative approaches to assessment.

The theoretical framework of the alternative assessment according to Janisch, Liu and Akrofi (2007) are enumerated as follow:

- Learners as knowledge constructors: alternative assessment is in keeping with constructivist theory, which sees to learners as active constructors of knowledge. Meaning is made by learners and teachers and is not predetermined. Alternative assessment has the capacity to shift the traditional paradigm of student as passive participants and to promote student 'initiative', 'self-discipline', and 'choice'.
- Authenticity and being situated in the classroom: alternative assessment acknowledges the classroom context and each learner's individual development. Assessment activities are merged with classroom environment and ongoing classroom practice, and provide teachers with certain feedback so that they can adapt their teaching and promote students learning immediately. Teachers do not have to allocate time for testing, due to the fact that assessment and instruction are integrated.
- Assessment is dynamic and ongoing: since the learner's entire learning is under constant observation by the teacher, the teacher does a continuous scrutiny of how students 'approach', 'monitor' and 'process' language. Students are involved in 'self-evaluation' and 'self-reflection' which helps them in keeping the track of their own learning.

- Empowerment of students: there are some hallmarks to alternative assessment such as student ownership of learning, the value of setting appropriate personal goals, evaluation of one's own progress toward these goals. Self-reflection and assessment by learners help them become active in and responsible for their learning.

According to Maclellan (2004) alternative assessment is an alternative to standardized, norm-referenced, multiple-choice testing with some features. These features are that: students are involved in deciding goals and assessment criteria; tasks are performed and artefacts/products are created; higher levels thinking and problem solving skills are used and supported; metacognitive, collaborative, and intrapersonal skills are also measured besides intellectual products; meaningful instructional activities are measured; contextualization in real world application is emphasized; and specific criteria are determined in advance in order to define standards for good performance.

Hamayan (1995) enumerates the characteristic of alternative language assessment as follow:

- Proximity to actual language use and performance: alternative assessment procedures are based on authentic communicative functions. Considering the fact that these procedures are directed at more real representation of language behavior, they have a tendency be based on actual performance in authentic circumstances, which learners are likely to face in their daily lives. As a result much of alternative assessment is classroom-based and locally developed. This shift of emphasis has resulted in the social and cultural change within schools. The role that language teachers have in language assessment have begun to change from one of recipient of information about learners to that of to a provider of information to others such as administrators, policy makers and other teachers.
- A holistic view of language: alternative assessment believes in the interrelationship among the various aspects of language, such as phonology, grammar, and vocabulary. The four language skills also represent a structurally integrated whole. Alternative assessment contends that language should not be assessed as structure but rather as a tool for communication and self-expression.
- An integrative view of learning: alternative assessment attempts to appreciate the 'learners' total array' of skills and abilities. It is based on the idea that various aspects of a learner's life both academic and personal are essential to the development of language proficiency and cannot be neglected. It also calls for the unification of numerous aspects of learning which is comprised of not only processes such as acquiring and integrating knowledge, extending and refining knowledge, and using knowledge meaningfully, but also issues like modifying learner opinions towards learning.
- Developmental appropriateness: alternative assessment procedures dictate expectations that are proper for the cognitive, social, and academic growth of the learner. Since such assessment is aimed at satisfying individual learners' needs it conveys information about a learner's proficiency in the context of what is pertinent to the life and experiences related to that learner.
- Multiple referencing: perhaps due to unreliable psychometric properties and the mistrust that a single measure sometimes evokes, alternative assessment usually necessitates gaining information about the learner from numerous alternative sources and through several various means.

In regard to the purposes and uses of alternative assessment Hamayan (1995) maintains that contrary to standardized testing, which usually less meaningful scores, alternative assessment is easily interpreted and understood. The benefits of alternative assessment proposed by Hamayan (1995) are that: it provides students with the opportunity to see their achievements in a way that they can understand, and as a result it puts the responsibility for their own learning on their own shoulders; it allows parents to participate in educational process, and provides them with insights about what their children are doing in schools; it provides teachers with information about their students and their classroom for in order to make sound educational decisions. Hamayan (1995) categorized alternative assessment based on being structured or unstructured. Unstructured techniques are limited only by learners' and teachers' creativity- basically any activity that can be done within the realm of school. Structured techniques are more planned and tend to have clear outcomes.

Integrating Precision Teaching and Alternative/Dynamic Assessment

Since dynamic assessment can be considered as a subcomponent of alternative assessment from now on the term alternative assessment will be employed to refer to both concepts. Alternative assessment (AA) can also be in keeping with precision teaching in a number of ways. One of the attempts made in order to bring assessment and precision teaching together has been referred to as curriculum-based assessment (CBE), which has been designed based on PT principles. CBE assesses students in a direct way based on the materials they have been instructed in and presented with in hopefully integrated ways (Sinn, 2007). Through precise measurement of the behavioral frequencies, PT provides insights about the success or failure of teaching procedures. As mentioned before, PT does not involve only teaching, but rather it represents an integration of teaching, assessment and learning. This fact can be easily ascertained through representing the different names assigned to Precision Teaching (Kunzelmann, 1970 and Lindsley, 1971, cited in Neal, 1981), such as Precision Learning (White, 1986, cited in Calkin, 2003), and Precision Measurement (Boyce, 2003). Despite the fact that both PT and alternative assessment are tackling the same issues, due to their different affiliations, little attempt, if any, has been done in order to bring them together in order to satisfy recent views in the camp of alternative assessment. The claim is that PT satisfies tenets of alternative assessment (AA) in the following ways:

1. Criterion-referenced rather than norm-referenced assessment: Alternative assessment can be in keeping with precision teaching in that they both see to evaluation as a tool to collect information about learners in an individualized program rather than to summarize their achievements into simple scores which are then compared to the scores obtained by others. On the other hand in both cases criterion referenced assessment is preferred through which each learner is supported by comparing his/her achievement to himself/herself rather than to other learners and based on certain criteria. This fact has been emphasized in alternative assessment by introducing multiple referencing based on which psychometric characteristics and single measures are questioned and refuted as insufficient information and it is contended that obtaining information about the learner must be obtained from numerous sources and through various means. This requirement is met by PT through ongoing assessment and measurement of each student's performance on a daily basis and comparing his/her performance to his/her own performances in order to ensure that "every child in the class is learning successfully" (Hughes, Beverley & Whitehead, 2007, p. 222). PT obviated the problem of reducing learners' performances into simple scores. What PT emphasizes is not what the students can do based on a single shot score compared to scores obtained by other students, but rather how each student is moving on based on daily direct measurements of his/her behavior in order to ensure development in a certain positive behavior.
2. Alternative assessment (AA) and PT both advocate formative continuous assessment: according to Janisch, Liu and Akrofi (2007), DA (AA) involves dynamic ongoing assessment which means that when the learner's entire learning is being constantly observed by the teacher, the teacher is provided with an ongoing view about his/her students in approaching, monitoring and processing language. Students have the opportunity to get involved in self-evaluation and self-reflection which helps them to be in control of their own learning process. This is the same for PT which believes that acquiring and skill involves a gradual process (Arntzen, 2008), thus through PT teachers gain formative insights about their learners through viewing their daily behavior on standard celebration charts (SCC), a process which is considered as a sound formative evaluation procedure by Kubina and Starlin (2003). Data obtained through such formative assessment are valuable sources which can be employed in optimizing teaching practices and consequently in desired learning outcomes. The claim is that AA's call for an ongoing constant assessment has been met by PT through daily frequency counts of desired behaviors in language learners and providing them with immediate feedback in order to increase or decrease a certain linguistic behavior. According to Roberts and Norwich (2010), PT is based on a formative assessment in which instead of putting emphasis on assessment of learning as products (summative assessment), the focus is on illustrating processes as basis of learning experiences in order to improve results, on the other hand

assessment is at the service of learning (assessment for learning). What sets apart PT from behaviorism is the fact that errors made by learners are not taken as ominous signs of bad behavior, but rather they are taken positively as good omens of progress and development.

3. Zone of proximal development: as mentioned earlier Neal (1981) believes that precision teaching differentiates between learners on the basis of their abilities and expects teachers to determine their learners' instructional levels and to permit each learner move forward at his/her own pace to achieve higher stages. This is quite compatible with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, since through precision teaching each learner's potential level of development is attempted by teachers as more knowledgeable others (Ellis, 1997) through scaffolding learners by providing them with constant feedback. On the other hand teachers provide learners with adequate learning environments in which they can try to fulfill their potential (Kubina, Morrison & Lee, 2002). AA also, according to Poehner (2008), is highly compatible with Vygotsky's ideas about development, since AA believes that teaching and assessment must be integrated and this would result in seeing to assessment as intervention procedures employed to determine each individual learner's abilities and to help them achieve higher levels of proficiency. PT then can be considered as the realization of AA's aspirations for taking advantage of assessment in scaffolding teaching and learning, since it supports each learner with its providing him/her with appropriate teaching geared toward his/her current proficiency level discovered through daily data gathering. According to Hughes, Beverley, and Whitehead (2007) this approach of PT can be called "navigated learning" since teachers take advantage of short frequent measurements in order to "navigate the child through the learning sequence in the fastest way possible, in a similar manner to the way a captain of a ship uses a compass, or a coach helps an athlete improve performance" (p. 224).

4. Empowerment in PT and AA: according to Janisch, Liu and Akrofi (2007) alternative assessment has been criticized for some alterations such as student ownership of learning, the value of setting appropriate personal goals, evaluation of one's own progress toward these goals. Self-reflection and assessment by learners makes them active in and responsible for their learning and provides them with higher order thinking and metacognition. PT provides learners the opportunity to become aware of their own progress and to be provided with immediate feedback which results in their becoming more conscious about what and how of their learning. On the other hand PT is effective in empowering learners in their monitoring and changing their own inner behaviors since it allows one to investigate his/her inner thoughts and feelings through presenting daily frequency counts of thoughts on celebration charts (Lindsley, 1971, cited in Patterson & McDowell, 2009). On the other hand as Patterson and McDowell (2009) put it, what PT does is manipulating inner behaviors in order to promote positive thoughts and to suppress negative thoughts. It can be claimed that learners and teachers are both empowered by PT through being provided with self-monitoring opportunities in order to make real-time decisions (Lindsley, 1991). PT teaches learners to count their inner behaviors to become more aware about themselves and to modify their unwanted thoughts and feelings into desired ones (Calkin, 2003). What PT does is quite in keeping with AA's call for raising learners' self-awareness and metacognitive knowledge about their own learning process, and as Potts, Eshleman, and Cooper (1993) put it learners are provided with such awareness through self-counting and self-charting of their own behavior and making instructional decisions based on them as effective and reliable sources of information, a process that puts learners in possession of their own data.

5. Local classroom and generalizations: As mentioned earlier, According to Janisch, Liu and Akrofi (2007) alternative assessment happens in the classroom through which teachers are involved in making decisions in regard to measures employed. They further maintain that alternative assessment acknowledges the classroom context and each learner's individual development. Assessment activities are merged with classroom environment and ongoing classroom practice, and provide teachers with certain feedback so that they can adapt their teaching and promote students learning immediately. Teachers do not have to allocate time for testing, due to

the fact that assessment and instruction are integrated. PT also advocates a classroom-based assessment through which the data gathered from learners are used to make sound decisions about teaching and to promote learning. Lindsley (1992) contends that "least costly and most effective learning occurs with classroom performance timed, counted, and charted daily by learners themselves" (p. 51). Thus PT has proposed a way of integrating teaching, learning, and assessment in the classroom. According to Ragnarsddottir (2007) as the research part of PT, frequency counts provide an important contribution to classroom teaching. Frequency counts are data to be employed in PT classroom and are not supposed to be generalized to other teaching contexts. The aim in PT is to promote the individuals' performance in one classroom rather than finding solutions to promote the performance of all learners in all the classrooms. Thus PT involves a data-based classroom assessment aimed at promoting instruction and consequently learning involving a single-subject classroom-based research. Due to be based on teaching, learning and assessment in particular classroom, both AA and PT set predetermined objectives to be employed as criteria in judgments made by teachers and learners and in their decision making. According to Maclellan (2004) in alternative assessment specific criteria are determined for one classroom in advance in order to define standards for good performance. PT also involves assessing each individual learner's instructional level in order to support the learner to progress at his/her own rate toward a more advanced succeeding level of a predetermined curriculum sequence (Neal, 1981).

6. Constructivism: According to Janisch, Liu and Akrofi (2007) alternative assessment has a constructivist view of learning whereby learning outcomes are under the influence of the student, the text, and the context. Alternative assessment also takes learners as active constructors of knowledge through which meaning is not predetermined and promotes learners' "initiative, self-discipline, and choice" (Janisch, Liu and Akrofi, 2007, p. 223). According to Buhagiar (2007), AA believes that the purpose of assessment has shifted from categorizing students for assignment to pre-determined curricular and instructional programs to tailoring instructional programs to learners' individual needs and to connecting learners and groups of learners in mutually beneficial learning experiences. The same constructivist view is also present in PT. This fact is also quite compatible with PT since it emphasizes gearing the teaching program to the learners' needs rather than to what the syllabus dictates (Raybould & Solity, 1982). On the other hand "the learner's outcome defines best practice rather than theories, beliefs, or cherished practices" (Kubina, Ward & Mozzini, 2000, p. 191). As one of the main tenets of PT it is claimed that "the child knows best" (Hughes, Beverley & Whitehead, 2007, p. 222) which means that a child's responses are the best sources of information about the success or failure of a teaching approach with that child (Hughes, Beverley & Whitehead, 2007). PT is also constructivist in that it takes learners as active assessors of their own performance rather than passive recipients of knowledge. Decisions in a PT classroom is not made only by teachers and based on what Lindsley (1992) maintains "least costly and most effective learning improvement changes occur with chart-based decisions made by the learners and their teachers" (p. 51).

7. Testing in service of learning: according to Buhagiar (2007), AA as realizations of Constructivist theories in assessment believe that tests show what students know and can do, as well as facilitate good learning-what Glaser (1990, cited in Buhagiar, 2007) calls 'placing tests in the service of learning'. As mentioned before, according to Roberts and Norwich (2010), PT is based on a formative assessment in which instead of putting emphasis on 'assessment of learning' as products (summative assessment), the focus is on illustrating processes as basis of learning experiences in order to improve results, on the other hand assessment is at the service of learning i.e., 'assessment for learning'. On the other hand PT satisfies AA's constructivist views through considering assessment as support for learning. According to Neal (1981) PT is different from other evaluation systems in that it sees to evaluation as a tool to provide teachers with information in developing more satisfactory individualized programs in order to promote learning a certain behavior. PT evaluates each individual learner's performance in order to determine

whether teaching has been successful or not and if "learning doesn't occur as intended there has been no successful teaching" (Raybould & Solity, 1988, p. 32).

8. All of the above sections which discuss how PT and AA are quite in keeping with each other can be applied to learning and teaching of numerous fields including language as the main focus in this study. What is specific to language teaching and assessment from an AA perspective is the fact that, according to Hamayan (1995) language assessment should fulfill an authentic communicative function as a realization of actual performance in authentic environments faced by learners in their daily lives, an integration of different aspects of language learning for self-expression and communication and finally as an integrative view of learning. PT serves the good job of promoting learners' fluency and accuracy and in language learning such fluency and accuracy are valuable to the extent that they represent real and authentic language use rather than discrete language skills. Binder (1996, cited in Kubina, Morrison & Lee, 2000), takes accuracy as one component of fluency, and Houghton (1981, cited in Lindsley, 1991) maintains that high performance fluency in PT is related to five learning outcomes as the realization of automatic or fluent behavior: retention, endurance, application, performance, and stability (REAPS). Although PT has a rich literature for research in the field of improving learners with Autism, the claim is that PT is effective in promoting the proficiency level, fluency, and accuracy of all language learners. One way to integrate different aspects of language to serve in real, authentic communications and for self-expression can be basing PT on formulaic expressions (chunks) of a language in order to promote fluency and accuracy in language receptions and productions. On the other hand frequency counts of formulaic expressions can be taken as the data to be employed in decision makings about language learning and teaching in a Precision Language Teaching (PLT) program. The theoretical basis of the fact that formulaic expressions promote fluency (Miller, 2010; Wray & Perkins, 2000; Erman, 2009; Wood, 2007, 2006, 2002) and accuracy (Boers, Kappel, Stenger & Demecheleer, 2006; Ellis, Simpson-Vlach & Maynard, 2008) in language learners has been already well established in literature. Since PT takes frequency of behavior and the rate of performance (Kessissoglou & Farrell, 1995) as the main factors in determining the fluency and accuracy in one certain behavior, PLT can also take the frequency of the presence of formulaic expressions in language learners' reception and production probes as signs of language fluency and accuracy.

METHOD

This paper is an attempt to illustrate how precision teaching and alternative assessment are compatible with each other. As a library research, through a related literature review which introduces the concepts of precision teaching and alternative assessment (presented above) this paper tries to prove the fact that precision teaching of language is the practical realization of alternative approaches to language assessment and Precision Language Teaching is introduced as a realization of integrating PT and AA in language classrooms.

DISCUSSION

After a close study of tenets advocated by PT and AA one easily finds that they are immediately related. As a model of teaching and learning aiming at prompting fluency and accuracy, PT meets the concerns of AA in certain ways. Both PT and AA take evaluation as an individualized process through which the performance of each learner should be compared to his/her own rather than to other learners as a norm-referenced assessment which may result in stigmatizing low-scorers. Obtaining one-single shot data from learners and basing decisions on them has been denounced by AA, and PT fulfils this end through organizing numerous assessments on a daily basis and comparing each learner's performance to his/her own performance in previous days. The claim is that PT represents a criterion-referenced and formative assessment which helps learners and teacher in making appropriate decisions and is supportive of teachers in discovering the effectiveness of their teaching for each learner and thus in meeting each individual learner's needs. The next similarity between PT and AA is the fact that both of them put faith into an ongoing continuous assessment which provides both teachers and learners with insights about their own teaching and learning. Their contention is that focus

should be on the processes of teaching and learning rather than subsequent final products through which errors are taken as good omens of progress rather than ominous signs of bad in-built behaviors, as has been the case in radical behaviorism. Such standpoint paves the way for integration of teaching, learning, assessment, and even classroom research as the main maxim of AA and as the realization of PT in classrooms. Next, both PT and AA are highly compatible with Vygotsky's ideas about development in that AA sees to assessment as an intervention employed to decide individual learners' current developmental level and to support or scaffold them accomplish higher language proficiency level. In a similar vein, PT gains knowledge about each learner's developmental level, and does this through daily recordings of certain behaviors on celebration charts and provides learners with constant immediate feedback in order to support, scaffold or to put it into Whitehead's (2007) terms to navigate the learners towards success in the fastest way possible. The similarity between PT and AA becomes more projected considering the fact that when AA asks for putting the ownership of learning into the hands of learners themselves for turning them into metacognitive learners, PT fulfills this end in practice through raising learners' awareness about the what and how of their own learning progress and maintains that the learner knows best. PT puts learners at an advantageous point by providing them with the opportunity to monitor and change their own inner behavior through investigating their inner thoughts and feelings by being presented with frequency counts and celebration charts. What empowers both teachers and learners in PT is their self-monitoring opportunities in making real-time decisions. The environment in which AA and PT take place is another common point between the two. They both acknowledge the classroom context as the locus for their practices within which teaching and assessment are integrated and PT represents a data-based classroom-based assessment through which data gathered on a daily basis. Frequency counts obtained in PT is for local classroom use only and the necessity of generalization of findings for one context to other contexts is not felt in PT. Due to this position both PT and AA allow for determining the curriculum objectives in advance so that the assessment of learners' current level of development can be based on predetermined curriculum sequence. On the other hand each learner's performance is compared to his/her own prior performance based on preplanned criteria. AA promotes the status of learners from passive recipients of knowledge to those of active constructors of meaning whose needs form the basis of instructional programs. PT also heeds learners' needs and takes information provided by learners as sources to be used in judgments about the success or failure of a teaching method. PT is constructivist in that it takes learners as active assessors of their own performance rather than as passive recipients of knowledge. One corollary of a constructivist approach toward assessment is that tests should be put at the service of learning and not only as measurements of the amount of learning. PT also believes in assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning. On the other hand the role of assessment is defined as the support for learning. Apart from all these discussions which are common between language and other subjects, alternative assessment puts some expectations on alternative language assessment such as authentic communicative functions, integration of different aspects of language, and an integrated view of language learning. As mentioned before PT has a focus on fluency and accuracy in learning skills and defines the components of fluent behavior as retention, endurance, and application. The claim made is that PLT fulfils some principles of alternative language assessment such as the integration of all language skills, authentic self-expression and communication, and a holistic view to language through taking formulaic expressions as the main probes used in PT. PLT helps language learners become fluent and accurate through meeting REAPS principles (Lindsley, 1991), i.e., to retain their ability to use language authentically at the absence of practice (since formulaic expressions are meaningful and easily memorized), endure their high level of fluency and accuracy (since formulaic expressions are crucial to fluency and accuracy), to apply their knowledge to unknown more complex situations (since formulaic expressions are flexible to change), perform based on standards set for training aims (since formulaic expressions lend themselves to organization and standardization) , and finally to be stable in resisting disturbances (since formulaic expressions are helpful in concentrating on meanings to be conveyed).

CONCLUSION

PT can be defined as the practical realization of alternative approaches toward traditional assessments through representing an ongoing,

individualized, evaluative, awareness-raising research process which is friendly towards learners' needs and puts emphasis on criterion-reference, formative, and classroom-based assessment and facilitates making proper decisions through discovering each learner's developmental level in order to enhance learners and also to empower and scaffold learners through providing them with constant feedback and eliminating their errors as signs of learning, a process which results in the integration of learning, assessment, teaching, and classroom research through seeing to assessment, as realized through classroom research, as a support to learning and teaching rather than as solely a scoring practice. Although precision teaching has been applied to learning in different fields, for language learning as one field of learning, Precision Language Teaching (PLT) can be proposed through which tenets of AA and also its tenets about language assessment, teaching and learning and PT's tenets about promoting fluency and accuracy are fully realized.

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