

## **The Main Priorities and Helpful Methods to Assess Speaking Skills in Higher Education**

**Saidxanova Dinara Ruslanovna – teacher**

Tashkent University of Applied Sciences, The department of foreign language and literature

**Abstract.** The current article discusses the main factors of assessment of speaking types of them and appropriate rate for the process. The study shows that Success in speaking means being able to communicate message using accurate and acceptable use of language throughout these levels. Knowing these levels shall help test maker understand what to expect from test taker's performance.

**Keywords:** speaking assessment, proficiency guidelines, rate, rubrics, strategic competence.

**Introduction.** Direct tests evaluate speaking skills and abilities in actual performance. The classic example of a direct assessment of speaking is an interview in which participants engage in structured or semi-structured interaction with an interlocutor/interviewer/rater. Speaking assessment methods centered on interviews are collectively referred to as OPIs or oral proficiency interviews. A very well-known OPI is the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages Oral Proficiency Interview or the ACTFL OPI (ACTFL, 2009), and many locally developed OPIs are modifications of the proficiency guidelines and elicitation procedures associated with the ACTFL OPI. Common OPI structures involve a series of warm-up questions followed by a subsequent series of increasingly difficult questions where examinees are expected to display concomitantly increasing levels of complexity in their responses [1]. Interviewers may be required to elicit a preselected set of responses, or may decide to follow up on topics or comments that the participant has introduced, or both. Examinee performance may be rated simultaneously by the interviewer or by additional raters who rate as the interview proceeds. When an audio or video recording is made, responses can be rated after the interview is completed.

**Literature review.** Assessment on speaking can be a very judgmental issue, in which people tend to relate on native/nonnative speakers on the basis of pronunciation [3]. Additionally, Nunan (1999) viewed that speaking requires someone to be linguistically competence in term of well articulating the sound, having sufficient vocabulary, and mastering structural or grammatical components. To speak also needs functional competence which means answering questions completely and logically. Another competence is strategic competence in which the speaker is able to use repairing strategies when conversation breaks down. And the last one is sociolinguistic/cultural competence. It demands the speakers to use the language appropriately to the context [8]. Learning how to teach and assess speaking skills is probably one of the biggest challenges compared to the other three language skills because you have to pay attention to aspects such as:

**Fluency:** This means *speaking* easily, reasonably quickly and without having to stop and pause a lot.

**Pronunciation:** The act or result of producing the sounds of speech, including articulation, stress, and intonation.

**Vocabulary:** The body of words used in a particular language.

**Accuracy:** This refers to how correct learners' use of the language system is, including their use of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary.

**Interaction:** This refers to the ability to interact with others during communicative tasks.

**Communication:** This refers to the students' ability to transmit her/his ideas.

Now that you know the aspects that you have to pay attention to, it is time to cover some of the different types of speaking activities that you can use to evaluate speaking skills [5].

There are five types of activities to assess speaking skills:

Intensive Speaking, Responsive Speaking, Interactive Speaking, Extensive Speaking, Imitative Speaking.

Now we are going to explore a little bit about each one of them

1. Intensive Speaking. **A read aloud Task:** Teacher listen to a recording and evaluate the students in a series of phonological factors and fluency.

Some variations of this task are: reading a scripted dialogue with someone else reading sentences containing minimal pairs reading information from a table chart

**Sentence/ dialogue completion task:** Students read through the dialogue so he can think about proper lines to fill in. The teacher produces one part orally and the students responds

**Picture cued Tasks:** The picture-cued requires a description from the test taker

2. Responsive Speaking. These are some of the task which can be used when using Responsive Speaking Tasks.

**Question and answer:** Students respond questions that the test administrator asks

**Giving Instructions and Directions:** The test-taker is asked to give directions or instructions

**Paraphrasing:** The test-taker is asked to paraphrase in two or three sentences what he heard or read.

3. Interactive Speaking. These are some of the most common interactive speaking tasks

**Interview:** It is a face-to-face exchange between test administrator and test taker. The stages of an interview are warm-up, level Check, probe and wind-down

**Role play** is a common pedagogical activities used in communicative English classes

**Discussions and Conversations:** These two speaking tasks provide a level of authenticity and spontaneity that other assessment techniques may not provide

**Games** are an informal assessment task but they are not commonly used.

4. Extensive Speaking. These are some of the most common extensive speaking tasks that you can use to assess speaking.

**Oral Presentations** are the most common task for evaluating extensive speaking, these are evaluated based on content and delivery.

**Picture-cued story telling:** Students describe a story based on series of pictures that they previously saw.

**Re-Telling a story, News Event:** Students are asked to tell a story of a new of something they heard or read.

5. Imitative speaking. Imitative speaking tasks are based on repetition. You just need to repeat a sentence you hear.

**Methodology.** Brown and Knight, B contend that to provide effective assessment, there are four rules that need to establish: specify criterion, give appropriate tasks, present maximum output, and set practical and reliable scoring procedures. For this assessment, the table on oral presentation criteria below is going to be used to evaluate students' performance. Each criterion is designed to ease teacher to score students' presentation. It is also practical as teacher only needs to put ticks on the appropriate score presented in. Each rating criteria is worth some points. The table below shows the numbers [2,5].

Table. Rating Points

Initial	Criteria	Score
E	Excellent	5 points
VG	Very good	4 points
G	Good	3 points
S	Satisfactorily	2 points
P	Poor	1 point

**Conclusion.** The key of assessing speaking skill is understanding the continuum of (1) spoken language, (2) task types and (3) scoring rubric. This non-rigid separation between one level of competence and another requires time and effort in specifying the criteria of speaking, task to elicit particular behavior and in developing practical yet representative scoring rubric. The variety of task types will help test maker to decide which one is appropriate for the wide array of the continuum of this particular skill.

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