“The ability to speak a foreign language is without doubt the most prized language skill, and rightly so. . . .”
Robert Lado
(Language Testing, 1961, p. 239)

Assessing Speaking: Putting the Pieces Together
Glenn Fulcher

http://languagetesting.info
Outline of the Webinar

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“Yet, testing the ability to speak a foreign language is perhaps the least developed and the least practiced in the language testing field”
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- **Background**
  - Why assess speaking? – A little bit of history
- **Concepts**
  - What are we assessing? – Defining the constructs
- **Information**
  - How can we elicit evidence? – Tasks types
- **Decisions**
  - How can we assess speaking? – Rubrics and scales
- **Planning**
  - Designing assessments – Creating specifications
- **Quality**
  - Using assessments – Raters, Interlocutors, and feedback
Why assess speaking? A little bit of history

• The situation prior to WWII: Army Beta

  
  The urgency of the world situation does not permit of erudite theorizing in English about the grammatical structure of the language for two years before attempting to converse of to understand telephone conversations...The nature of the individual test items should be such as to provide specific, recognizable evidence of the examinee’s readiness to perform in a life-situation, where lack of ability to understand and speak extemporaneously might be a serious handicap to safety and comfort, or to the effective execution of military responsibilities.


• The FSI (1952 – 1958)

• ILR (1968)

• ACTFL & the OPI (1987)

• cf. Assessing speaking in the United Kingdom
Yesterday and today...

Continuity:

- Linking language production to real-world contexts
- Valuing communication over knowledge about the language
- Achieving communicative goals effectively
- Performing work related tasks safely
- Placing individuals in appropriate training or jobs
- Acquiring competence in educational contexts
- Giving learners a sense of achievement
- Motivating further learning
- Providing useful feedback on learning
- Producing competent individuals for the nation
Poll Time

What is the main reason for you to assess speaking in your own context?

(a) Focus on communication in the classroom
(b) Prepare learners for the world of work
(c) Prepare learners to operate in an educational environment
(d) Motivate learners
(e) Other (Let us know on the discussion board)
What are we assessing?

Defining the constructs – or what does it mean to ‘speak’?

- ACCURACY – Language Competence
  - Pronunciation
  - Stress
  - Intonation
  - Syntax
  - Vocabulary
  - Cohesion
What are we assessing?
Defining the constructs – or what does it mean to ‘speak’?

• FLUENCY
  • Hesitation
  • Repetition
  • False starts
  • Self-correction
  • Re-selecting lexical items
  • Restructuring sentences
What are we assessing?
Defining the constructs – or what does it mean to ‘speak’?

- **COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**
  - Overgeneralization
  - Paraphrase
  - Word coinage
  - Restructuring
  - Cooperative strategies
  - Code switching
  - Non-linguistic strategies

**Achievement Strategies**

**Avoidance Strategies**

- Formal avoidance
- Functional avoidance
What are we assessing?

Defining the constructs – or what does it mean to ‘speak’?

• DISCOURSE COMPETENCE
  • Scripts
  • Adjacency pairs
  • Turn taking
  • Openings and closings

• INTERACTIONAL COMPETENCE
  • Managing co-constructed speech

• TASK COMPLETION
  • Is the outcome successful?
What are we assessing?

Defining the constructs – or what does it mean to ‘speak’?

• PRAGMATIC & SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE
  • Appropriateness
  • Implicature (speech acts)
  • Establishing identity (being through words)
  • Situational sensitivity
  • Topical knowledge
  • Cultural knowledge
  • Honorifics
Poll Time

What do you think is the most important aspect of speaking to assess in your own context?

(a) Accuracy  
(b) Fluency  
(c) Strategies  
(d) Discourse and Interactional Competence  
(e) Pragmatics
How can we elicit evidence?
Task Types (Fulcher, 2003, p. 57)

• Task Orientation
  • Open (outcomes dependent upon speakers)
  • Guided (by instructions)
  • Closed (outcomes dictated by input or instructions)

• Interactional Relationship
  • Non-interactional (monologue)
  • One-way
  • Two-way
  • Multi-way
How can we elicit evidence?

Task Types (Fulcher, 2003, p. 57)

- Goal Orientation
  - None
  - Convergent
  - Divergent
- Interlocutor Status and Familiarity
  - No interlocutor
  - Higher status
  - Lower status
  - Same status
  - Degree of familiarity
- Topic(s)
- Situations
Poll Time

Which of the four task types would you prefer to use?

(a) Reading aloud
(b) Talking with the teacher
(c) Pictures
(d) Simulation

After voting you may wish to say why in the chat box.
Where Do We Store Speech?

The ephemeral nature of speaking

- Let it pass
  - Score in real time
  - No going back

Options for Pedagogy

- Audio
  - Web Portfolio
  - Podcasting

- Video
  - Web Portfolio
  - Vodcasting

- Integrated Projects
  - News/Magazines
  - Content & Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)
### Rating Performance
Evaluating the Quality of Language Using Rating Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEASUREMENT DRIVEN APPROACHES</th>
<th>DATA DRIVEN APPROACHES</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>• Expert judgment</td>
<td>• Data-based scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experiential</td>
<td>• EBB scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scaling ‘can do’ statements</td>
<td>• Performance Decision Trees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Poll Time

Which rating scale do you think might be most useful in your context?

(a) ACTFL
(b) CEFR
(c) EBB
(d) Data-Based
(e) PDT
Designing Speaking Assessments

Creating Test Specifications

Identifying Purpose for Assessment
- Defining the Learners
- Describing Reasons for Communicating
- Identifying Constructs/Intended Outcomes

Setting Up a Design Team
- Teachers and Other Stakeholders
- Assessment Advisors
- Administrators

Designing Specs and Tasks Iteratively
- Writing and Prototyping Tasks
- Developing Scoring Systems

Administrative Guidelines
- Timing, Resources, Equipment
Using Assessments

**Raters**
- Consistency between judges
- Consistency within judges
- Convergence or Divergence?

**Interlocutors**
- Accommodations
- Scaffolding (teacher talk)
- Behavior
- Mannerisms

**Feedback**
- Audience
- Purpose
- Response
- Time
- Opportunities to Learn
Poll Time

Is convergence or divergence more important in making qualitative judgments?

(a) Convergence
(b) Divergence
Glenn Fulcher

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http://languagetesting.info