

DESIGNING CRITERIA TO ASSESS SPEAKING SKILLS

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This work focuses on the assessment of speaking skills. Speaking is considered the most important of all skills by many and yet, students' speaking skills are often practiced and developed, but not extensively assessed. The question has to be asked: why are teachers reluctant to assess speaking and focus on assessing other skills instead? The issue with the assessment of speaking skills is that, compared to other skills, it is demanding for teachers. Not only is it time consuming, but teachers often take on more roles (interviewer, assessor, etc.) at once, have to evaluate their students' performances and produce an assessment in real time, which puts a lot of pressure on them. If you need to assess your students' speaking skills there are a number of factors you need to consider. These include considering the test taker and their needs, the kind of information you want to know about their speaking skills and the most appropriate ways to elicit and assess these skills so that your test is appropriate and accurately scored.

Speaking, sometimes referred to as oral production, is one of the four skills used when learning a foreign language. Being able to communicate a message orally is a complex process which involves putting the speaker's theoretical as well as practical knowledge of the foreign language in practice. According to Hinkel that includes phonetics, morphology, syntax, discourse markers and, last but not least, lexis. [1,p. 485]

The assessment of this skill is equally complex. Ur emphasizes the importance of speaking skills when learning a foreign language as many, if not a majority of foreign language learners, aim at mastering speaking. It is also worth noticing that a person who is able to use a foreign language is referred to as a speaker, which suggests that speaking is, so to say, super ordinate to other skills. Yet, the difficulties connected with the actual process of assessing these skills are so severe that many language teachers assess oral production only to a limited extent, give it very little importance, or do not assess it at all. [2, pp.120 - 134)

Basic Types of Speaking - Levels of Interaction of Speaking and Listening Skills In order to be able to isolate speaking from listening and therefore to be able to fulfill the aim of assessment of oral production and interaction, it is necessary to specify individual levels of interaction of speaking and listening skills. Brown uses a taxonomy in which he distinguishes between five levels; they are as

follows: imitative, intensive, responsive, interactive and last but not least extensive (monologue) speaking. [3, pp. 141 – 142]

Basic Types of Assessment The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), being a major influence on language teaching across Europe presents an extensive list of individual types of assessment, some examples being: formative/summative assessment, subjective/objective assessment, direct/indirect assessment, holistic/analytic assessment, etc. [4, p.183]

Formal and informal assessment. Nevertheless, Brown claims that in its broadest sense assessment can be divided into two basic categories: informal and formal. The former one may be characterized as any kind of teachers' feedback aimed at the students, such as a word of encouragement, a smile, a pointed finger, a piece of advice concerning pronunciation, grammar, etc. [3, p.5]

Formative and summative assessment. Another division comprises of the two following categories: formative and summative. According to Hughes, formative assessment serves the purpose of forming both the teaching as well as the learning part of the educational process. In other words that means that teachers use the feedback of such kind of assessment to monitor and modify their teaching plans and techniques and students may use it to see their progress and change their learning strategies accordingly. To build on the terminology of the previous division, each and every informal assessment is formative. Summative assessment, by contrast, sums up what the students have learned over a period of time - usually a unit, semester or the whole year and looks back at how successful the students have been in achieving the objective(s) of the unit, semester or the whole year. [5, p.5]

Direct and indirect assessment. Direct and indirect assessment, being another category, is often mentioned in reference to assessing oral skills. The difference between the former and the latter one is the fact that when the teachers choose direct assessment, they assess what the students is actually performing. Simply said, if the teachers wish to assess speaking, they have the students produce language orally, i.e. speak. An example of such assessment may be when a small group of students discuss something; the assessor observes such action, compares it with the criteria that were set prior to the assessment procedure and produces an assessment. Holistic and analytic scoring (assessment). According to The Council of Europe, in order for assessment to produce valid, reliable and consistent results it is also extremely important to distinguish between scales for scoring (assessing) speaking skills that are used most frequently - holistic and analytic. [4, pp.186-187]

In conclusion, here's given the way you can evaluate speaking:

Create a Rubric. Most teachers will be familiar with the concept of grading with a rubric, a table with different criteria and a grading scale.

Pronunciation is a basic quality of language learning. Though most second language learners will never have the pronunciation of a native speaker, poor pronunciation can obscure communication and prevent an ESL student from making his meaning known.

Vocabulary. You should encourage your students to have a large production vocabulary and an even larger recognition vocabulary.

Accuracy. Grammar has always been and forever will be an important issue in foreign language study.

Communication. Assessing communication in your students means looking at their creative use of the language they do know to make their points understood.

Interaction. Encourage your students to listen as they speak and have appropriate responses to others in the conversation.

Fluency. You can have excellent grammar and still fail to be fluent. You want your students to be at ease when they speak to you or other English speakers. Fluency is a judgment of this ease of communication and is an important criterion when evaluating speaking.

References

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