

Speaking

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based on a presentation by

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Outline

- Characteristics and types of “Speaking”
- What should our learners be able to do?
 - The “Standards” and the CEF
- What do we want to test and how?
 - Test specifications
 - Examples of good practice
 - What makes a good interlocutor
 - Writing tasks
 - Assessing candidate performance

- Why do we find relatively few speaking/oral tests/exams in Germany?

time-consuming

difficult to administer

costly in terms of manpower

not easy to set appropriate tasks

problems of assessment – What? How?

Characteristics of Speaking

- Takes place in real time
 - We use different language in different situations
 - Some of it is planned
 - Some of it is unplanned/spontaneous
 - Formal versus colloquial
 - Speaking is a social and (usually) interactive process and skill
- Speaking is often dependent on listening

- Spoken language contains generic words e.g. “thing”, “thingy” etc.
- Spoken language contains fillers e.g. “you know”, “you see”, “kind of”, “as it were” etc
- it employs set phrases and expressions e.g “I thought you’d never ask”, “Let’s not go there”, “You must be joking”, ...
- The speaker needs to choose the appropriate language for a particular context

- Speakers hesitate, add pauses
- Speakers need time to process both input and output (speed depends on proficiency, familiarity, perceived accuracy requirements and penalties)
- “small words/lubrifications” are employed
e.g. “really”, “oh”, “well”, “I mean”, [Hasselgren, 2004]“yes but ...”
- Scientific studies ...
“support the case that the more small words a learner uses, the better their perceived fluency” (Luoma, *Assessing Speaking*, page 19)

- Planned:

- the speaker has prepared and practised a speech or presentation (at home / before the test)
- pronunciation and intonation have been practised
- often tends towards formality of lexis and syntax

- Unplanned

- e.g. everyday conversation – spontaneous utterances; short sense units, incomplete sentences
- pronunciation and intonation less controlled
- lexis and syntax tend to be informal/colloquial

Situations

- Chatting
 - Conversation, small talk
 - purpose: to establish and maintain contact;
 - the atmosphere is friendly, tendency to agreement rather than argument
 - often found at the beginning of speaking tests i.e. the warm-up (Should the warm-up be assessed?)

Situations (2)

- Transmission / exchange of information on a particular topic / transactional
 - aim: to communicate a specific piece of information or statement successfully i.e. so that the “message” is understood
 - characteristics: establishing a common basis of conversation, exchanging information in easily manageable and comprehensible “bites”; information is presented in a logical sequence; questions and answers, repetition and checking whether the message has been understood

What we need to consider when developing speaking tasks/tests.(1):

- The purpose of the test:
 - diagnostic (using a test to determine the strengths and weaknesses of a test taker or test takers / establishing the level the test-taker has reached to determine future needs)
 - assessing performance and awarding grades (classroom situation / year 10 examination?)
 - placement (assigning to particular courses, admission to university)
 - proficiency (determining the level of a test taker against a descriptor of performance such as the CEFR)

What we need to consider when developing speaking tasks/tests.(2):

- *functions (please refer to the CEF):*
 - **expressing** (thanks, advice, opinions, information, apologies, wants/needs, complaints, attitudes, ideas, reasons, preferences)
 - **requesting** (advice, information, permission, reasons)
 - **describing** (people, places, objects)
 - **comparing/contrasting** (people, places, objects, situations)
 - **narrating** (stories, events)

- agreeing/disagreeing
- accepting / refusing
- persuading, warning, making suggestions
- directing, ordering, giving permission
- analysing, criticising, predicting,
arguing for/against, summarising

- Output

The test taker should be able to:

- describe a picture
- give a presentation
- make a speech
- initiate / maintain a conversation
- negotiate a conclusion
- give detailed directions
- provide an explanation
- make an apology ... [Banerjee, 2007]

CEFR

- give a prepared talk and answer follow-up questions
- give straightforward descriptions, reasons and explanations on a variety of familiar subjects
- give short justifications and explanations for views, plans or actions
- give detailed accounts of experiences describing feelings and reactions
- relate the plot of a book or film and describe his/her reactions
- narrate a simple story or event

Factors which influence the test-taker's performance

- Knowledge of the language – level of competence
- personal characteristics e.g. age, gender, nationality, L1, education, preparation for and familiarity with the test situation and the test in general
- general knowledge
- emotional reaction to the task
- interaction with other candidates (paired or group, known / unknown, gender, level of proficiency of group members)
- interaction with the interlocutor

Examiner

- Should there be one person who performs two roles (interlocutor and assessor) or two people?
- Personal characteristics of the interlocutor:
 - gender, age, experience of testing, accent, speed of delivery, native v non-native speaker
- Inter-action with the test-taker(s):
 - nature and scope – interlocutor frame

The tasks

- level of difficulty /CEF level
 - uni-level or multi-level
- task type: e.g. role-play, interview, conversation, short presentation etc.
- material/stimuli: e.g. photographs, role-play cards,
- length of the task
 - preparation time
 - speaking time

Tasks continued

- number of tasks within a test?
- instructions for the candidate **and** the examiner / interlocutor
 - [Interlocutor Frame – essential for fairness and standardisation]
- administration of the test:
 - planning, organisation, blocking
 - will the test be recorded?
 - preparation, supervision, invigilation ... ?



**Test Specifications
and the
Common European Framework**

Assessment of Speaking Tasks/Tests

Scales

- **Holistic scales** = “express an overall impression of an examinee’s ability in one score” (Luoma, pages 60/61)
- **Analytical scales** = assess a number of different aspects of the candidate’s performance e.g.
 - task fulfilment - content and communication
 - pronunciation
 - fluency
 - organisation (coherence/cohesion)
 - grammar – range and accuracy
 - vocabulary - range and accuracy
 - interaction - e.g. with the examiner/interlocutor, in pair or group tasks

Speaking Assessment Scales

The background is a solid teal color. In the lower half, there is a faint, semi-transparent image of two hands shaking, symbolizing agreement or partnership. The text 'Speaking Assessment Scales' is centered in the upper half in a white, serif font with a slight drop shadow.

Good Practice

- careful test development procedure: constantly revised test specifications
- strictly controlled item production procedure (revision and editing of tasks)
- piloting all tasks with students
- training item-writers
- the use of item-writer guidelines

Good Practice continued

- standardised examination procedure (the use of an Interlocutor Frame)
- examiner training focusing on both interlocutor & assessor training
- the use of benchmarked performances in examiner training

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