Lecture 8: Assessing Speaking

Outline of today's lecture

► Challenges of speaking assessment

► Speaking as a skill and subskills

► Types of oral production

► Testing techniques and scoring of oral productions

► Special considerations for speaking tests

Why assess speaking?

► Speaking is part of language curricula, esp. in communicative LT

  ► if we teach communication skills, they should be assessed

► Speaking is part of life

  ► English is a global language

  ► Need to promote clear intercultural communications

Why assess speaking?

► Linking language production to real-world contexts

► Valuing communication over knowledge about the language

► Achieving communicative goals effectively

► Placing individuals in appropriate training or jobs

► Performing work related tasks safely

► Acquiring competence in educational contexts

► Giving learners a sense of achievement

► Motivating further learning

► Providing useful feedback on learning

Inherent challenges and practicalities of assessing speaking

► **Inherent challenges:**

  ► **What exactly is the construct of speaking?**

  ► Can we separate speaking from listening and reading comprehension?

► **Practical challenges:**

  ► How to evaluate? How to score?

  ► How to elicit desired response?

  ► How to make testing fair, regardless of a TT's and SS's personality, social skills, culture etc.?

  ► How to decrease time- and work-intensiveness both for T and TTs?

Theory of speaking assessment

► Speaking is a complex skill (Harris, 1977)

  ► Pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, purpose, fluency and comprehension

► Canale and Swan (1980) - four competencies underlying speaking ability:

  ► Grammatical competence

  ► Discourse competence

  ► Sociolinguistic competence

  ► Strategic competence

Classifying oral skills (based on Weir 1993)

- ► **Repertoire of routines**
  - ► Exchanging information

    Provide personal information, give instructions, narrate a story, describe something

  - ► Interacting

    Telephoning, buying and selling, requests, interviews, expressing opinions, making suggestions

- ► **Improvisational skills**
  - ► Negotiating meaning

    Indicating purpose, checking understanding, express dis/agreement, seeking clarification

  - ► Managing interaction

    Initiating & sustaining, changing topics, turn-taking, concluding a discussion

Speaking subskills
based on Brown H (2010)

Micro-skills

- ► Creation of sounds
- ► Chunks of speech
- ► Stress
- ► Reduced forms
- ► Meaning and grammar
- ► Fluency
- ► Cohesion

Macro-skills

- ► Language functions
- ► Style and register, implied meaning, literal/non-literal meanings
- ► Conversation rules
- ► Use non-verbal cues to enhance the message
- ► Employ speaking strategies

Assessing interactive speech:

► Includes long stretches of interactive discourse. Can take two forms:

  ► Transactional language: to exchange specific information

  ► Interpersonal exchanges: social exchanges and relationships

► Some of the techniques commonly used include interviews, role plays, discussions, games

Assessing interactive speech: Interview

► Direct face-to-face exchange and proceeding through a protocol of questions and directives

► Interviews can vary in length, depending on their purpose:

  ► **Placement interview**

  ► **Comprehensive interview**

► A variation is to place two test-takers during one interview

► **Scoring**: accuracy in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary usage, fluency, sociolinguistic/pragmatic appropriateness, task accomplishment, and even comprehension

► Scoring facilitated by recording the interview.

Example: Interviews

1. Warm-up:

How are you?
What's your name?
What country are you from? What [city, town]?
Let me tell you about this interview.

2. Level check:

How long have you been in this [country, city]?
Tell me about your family.

What is your [academic major, professional interest, job]?
How long have you been working at your [degree, job]?
Describe your home [city, town] to me.
How do you like your home [city, town]?
What are your hobbies or interests? (What do you do in your spare time?)
Why do you like your [hobby, interest]?
Have you traveled to another country beside this one and your home
    country?
Tell me about that country.
Compare your home [city, town] to another [city, town].
What is your favorite food?
Tell me how to [make, do] something you know well.
What will you be doing ten years from now?
I'd like you to ask me some questions.
Tell me about an exciting or interesting experience you've had.
Read the following paragraph, please. [test-taker reads aloud]
Pretend that you are _____ and I am a _____. [guided role play
    follows]

3. Probe:

What are your goals for learning English in this program?
Describe your [academic field, job] to me. What do you like and dislike
    about it?
What is your opinion of [a recent headline news event]?
Describe someone you greatly respect, and tell me why you respect that
    person.
If you could redo your education all over again, what would you do
    differently?
How do eating habits and customs reflect the culture of the people of a
    country?
If you were [president, prime minister] of your country, what would you
    like to change about your country?
What career advice would you give to your younger friends?
Imagine you are writing an article on a topic you don't know very much
    about. Ask me some questions about that topic.
You are in a shop that sells expensive glassware. Accidentally you knock
    over an expensive vase, and it breaks. What will you say to the store
    owner? [Interviewer role-plays the store owner]

4. Wind-down:

Did you feel okay about this interview?
What are your plans for [the weekend, the rest of today, the future]?
You'll get your results from this interview [tomorrow, next week].
Do you have any questions you want to ask me?
It was interesting to talk with you. Best wishes.

Assessing interactive speech: Role play

► Popular activity in communicative language teaching classes.

► Controlled or ''guided'' by the interviewer

► **Scoring**: presents the usual complications as any task that elicits somewhat unpredictable responses from test-takers.

Assessing interactive speech: Discussions and conversations

► Difficult to specify and even more difficult to score.

► Offer a level of authenticity and spontaneity that other assessment techniques may not provide

► **Scoring**: checklists should be carefully designed to suit the objectives of the observed discussion

Assessing interactive speech: Discussions and conversations (ctd.)

Discussions may be specially appropriate tasks through which to elicit and observe such abilities as:

- topic nomination, maintenance, and termination;
- attention getting, interrupting, floor holding, control;
- clarifying, questioning, paraphrasing;
- comprehension signals (nodding, "uh-huh," "hmm," etc.);
- negotiating meaning;
- intonation patterns for pragmatic effect;
- kinesics, eye contact, proxemics, body language; and
- politeness, formality, and other sociolinguistic factors.

Assessing extensive speech:

► Complex, relatively lengthy stretches of discourse.

► Variations on monologues, an interlocutor's role is limited or none

Some of the most commonly used techniques include:

- ► Speeches and oral presentations
- ► Pictured cued story-telling
- ► Retelling a story or news event
- ► Translation (of extended prose)

Assessing extensive speech:
Oral Presentations

► TTs present a report, a paper, a marketing plan, a sales idea, a design of new product, or a method.

► **Scoring:** checklist and grid are common means of scoring these tasks. Specify the criterion clearly

  ► Set appropriate tasks

  ► Carefully elicit optimal output

  ► Establish practical, reliable scoring procedures

Oral Presentations (ctd.)

Evaluation of oral presentation

Assign a number to each box according to your assessment of the various aspects of the speaker's presentation.

3	Excellent
2	Good
1	Fair
0	Poor

Content:
☐ The purpose or objective of the presentation was accomplished.
☐ The introduction was lively and got my attention.
☐ The main idea or point was clearly stated toward the beginning.
☐ The supporting points were
- clearly expressed
- supported well by facts, argument

☐ The conclusion restated the main idea or purpose.

Delivery:
☐ The speaker used gestures and body language well.
☐ The speaker maintained eye contact with the audience.
☐ The speaker's language was natural and fluent.
☐ The speaker's volume of speech was appropriate.
☐ The speaker's rate of speech was appropriate.
☐ The speaker's pronunciation was clear and comprehensible.
☐ The speaker's grammar was correct and didn't prevent understanding.
☐ The speaker used visual aids, handouts, etc., effectively.
☐ The speaker showed enthusiasm and interest.
☐ [*If appropriate*] The speaker responded to audience questions well.

Picture-cued story-telling

► TTs elicit oral production through visual cues. Some of the stimuli used include:

Test-takers see:

- ► Pictures
- ► Photographs
- ► Diagrams
- ► Charts
- ► Series of pictures

for longer descriptions

Example:

Test-takers see:

Which painting would you buy? Why?
Persuade me to buy it.
Describe the kinds of paintings you like [in general].

Retelling a story or news event

► In these tasks test-takers hear or read a story or news event that they are asked to retell.

► Aspects evaluated: communicating sequences and relationships of events, stress and emphasis patterns, ''expression'' in the case of a dramatic story, fluency, and interaction with the hearer.

Validity issues

- Test <u>what</u> you teach, <u>how</u> you teach it
- Think about:
  - The type of English program
  - The target language skill for the students
  - The materials and class activities
    - Will Ss be familiar with the topics and tasks?
  - The teaching approach
    - CLT emphasizes genuine reasons for communication

Matching test to objectives

► The skills you choose to test should match your program's objectives

► Within the subskills, sample a broad range using several speaking tasks

   ► Broad sampling increases reliability

► In real life, speaking occurs interactively in real time; simulate these conditions

► Make tasks plausible, on familiar topics

Conditions of assessing speaking

► How many people?
  ► Effective to test 2 : 2
    ► Even with pairs, can test individuals
    ► Teachers have different roles:
      ► Interlocutor interacts with students and works from script
      ► Assessor tracks and rates performance; stay in background
► How many tasks?
  ► Sample range, provide multiple chances
► Types of prompts
  ► Use graphics, avoid excessive reading

Grading a productive skill

- What are the key subskills?
  - Communication of meaning
    - Comprehension
    - Appropriateness, relevance
  - Fluency: response time, sustains speech
  - Accuracy: grammar doesn't interfere
  - Vocabulary: appropriate to topic, level
  - Pronunciation: accent, stress, intonation
    - Intelligibility without effort

Grading a productive skill

Holistic

- ► Use a banding scheme
- ► Assign 1 overall mark based on impression
- ► Advantage= quick
- ► May influence reliability

Analytic

- ► Assess each criterion separately
- ► Allows for different weighting, different subskill development

Hybrid systems are possible. Whichever system you adopt, promote inter-rater reliability with training and moderation.

Use CEFR and other scales!

Things to keep in mind

► Speaking is stressful. Reduce tension to produce best results from students.

► Conform to agreed-upon criteria for assessment and marking schemes.

► Some students are slow to respond. Give them time before intervention.

► Techniques work for both testing and alternative/continuous assessment.

► If recording is feasible, leave tracks for feedback and remediation.