



## THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHING AND ASSESSING SPEAKING SKILLS

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### Annotation

This article studies the problems of teaching and improving speaking skills. It discusses the importance of assessment in classroom and forms the assessment criteria for teaching speaking skills.

**Keywords:** productive skills, receptive skills, communicative competence, the assessment criteria, formative assessment, summative assessment.

In this modern, communicative and technological era, English plays a prominent role in the development of global education and business. In the process of language learning, the main aim of the learner is to acquire the four language skills –listening, speaking, reading and writing. Among these, listening and reading are receptive skills whereas speaking and writing are productive skills. These skills must be focused in the classroom by teachers because the soul of language learning lies in language skills. The main objective of all these four language skills is to develop the learners' learning abilities in producing oral discourses. For effective communication in English, first of all, learners need to acquire the knowledge of both grammar and vocabulary which are the two basic and important components of a language. Once the learners learn some basic structures of English and some vocabulary, they can practice speaking skills under the guidance of their teachers. In this regard, Celce-Murcia and Olshtai point out, "In some ways speaking can be considered the most difficult skill to acquire as it requires command of speech production sub-skills like vocabulary retrieval, choice of grammatical patterns, and sociocultural competence". As there is a huge demand for speaking skills in the present job market, learners are now struggling to obtain these skills.

In recent years, one of the major problems related to English language learning is to develop learners to use the language effectively and proficiently. In teaching process, the assessment is one of the most important aspects to motivate the learners. Thus, while one improves any type skill, they should form the assessment criteria. In this article we are going to clarify the question how to assess speaking skills. Martha L. A. Stassen defines assessment as "the systematic collection and analysis of information to improve student learning." This definition captures the essential task of student assessment in the teaching and learning process. Student assessment enables instructors to measure the effectiveness of their teaching by linking student performance to specific learning objectives. As a result, teachers are able to institutionalize effective teaching choices and revise ineffective ones in their pedagogy.

The measurement of student learning through assessment is important because it provides useful feedback to both instructors and students about the extent to which students are successfully meeting course learning objectives. Most of the scholars argue that assessment provides the evidence needed to



document and validate that meaningful learning has occurred in the classroom. Assessment is so vital in their pedagogical design that their approach “encourages teachers and curriculum planners to first ‘think like an assessor’ before designing specific units and lessons, and thus to consider up front how they will determine if students have attained the desired understandings.”

There are generally two forms of student assessment, the first form, **summative assessment**, is assessment that is implemented at the end of the course of study. Its primary purpose is to produce a measure that “sums up” student learning. Summative assessment is comprehensive in nature and is fundamentally concerned with learning outcomes. While summative assessment is often useful to provide information about patterns of student achievement, it does so without providing the opportunity for students to reflect on and demonstrate growth in identified areas for improvement and does not provide an avenue for the instructor to modify teaching strategy during the teaching and learning process. Examples of summative assessment include comprehensive final exams or papers.

The second form, **formative assessment**, involves the evaluation of student learning over the course of time. Its fundamental purpose is to estimate students’ level of achievement in order to enhance student learning during the learning process. By interpreting students’ performance through formative assessment and sharing the results with them, instructors help students to “understand their strengths and weaknesses and to reflect on how they need to improve over the course of their remaining studies.” Formative assessment includes course work—where students receive feedback that identifies strengths, weaknesses, and other things to keep in mind for future assignments—discussions between instructors and students, and end-of-unit examinations that provide an opportunity for students to identify important areas for necessary growth and development for themselves.

This theory then developed as the criteria of speaking test assessment. However, the design of speaking assessment may vary; depend on the types of speaking assessed. Then, what should to be tested?

**Grammar Test** takers are assessed on how to control its usage within sentences, to construct, to use it appropriately and accurately and to avoid grammatical errors in speaking.

**Vocabulary.** The range, precision, and the usage of vocabulary features in a conversation used by test takers indicate the level of how proficient they are.

**Comprehension.** Understanding the context of the conversation and able to give appropriate response according to the question.

**Fluency.** The language fluency indicates that the production of speech in a conversation is well delivered. Have confidence in delivering the speech and able to responds specific theme without many hesitation in choosing words.

**Pronunciation** deals with how often errors in pronunciation occur and how the pronunciation aspect interfere the communication are the criteria of the assessment.



**Task** deals with finishing the command given during the speaking test. Like all test scores, speaking scores must be dependable, fair, and above all useful for the intended purposes. To ensure speaking skill assessment is trustworthy, there are factors that should come into consideration.

Every teacher may form their own assessment rubrics in order to evaluate them. We are going to show simple speaking assessment rubric that we often use in our lessons.

### Speaking assessment rubric

	Fluency	Pronunciation and accent	Vocabulary	Grammar	Details
5	Smooth and fluid speech; few to no hesitations; no attempts to search for words; volume is excellent.	Pronunciation is excellent; good effort at accent	Excellent control of language features; a wide range of well-chosen vocabulary	Accuracy & variety of grammatical structure	Excellent level of description; additional details beyond the required
4	Smooth and fluid speech; few hesitations; a slight search for words; inaudible word or two.	Pronunciation is good; good effort at accent	Good language control; good range of relatively well-chosen vocabulary	Some errors in grammatical structures possibly caused by attempt to include a variety.	Good level of description; all required information included
3	Speech is relatively smooth; some hesitation and unevenness caused by rephrasing and searching for words; volume wavers.	Pronunciation is good; Some effort at accent, but is definitely non-native	Adequate language control; vocabulary range is lacking	Frequent grammatical errors that do not obscure meaning; little variety in structures	Adequate description; some additional details should be provided
2	Speech is frequently hesitant with some sentences left uncompleted; volume very soft	Pronunciation is okay; No effort towards a native accent	Weak language control; basic vocabulary choice with some words clearly lacking	Frequent grammatical errors even in simple structures that at times obscure meaning.	Description lacks some critical details that make it difficult for the listener to understand
1	Speech is slow, hesitant & strained except for short memorized phrases; difficult to perceive continuity in speech; inaudible	Pronunciation is lacking and hard to understand; No effort towards a native accent	Weak language control; vocabulary that is used does not match the task	Frequent grammatical errors even in simple structures; meaning is obscured.	Description is so lacking that the listener cannot understand

### Conclusion

as we know that teaching and learning are one of the difficult processes. In order to motivate and make students interest to learn the language teacher should evaluate in any case.

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