



## **ASSESSMENT OF SPEAKING SKILL IN LANGUAGE INSTITUTIONS AND PROBLEMS RELATED TO IT**

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**Abstract.** The current article intends to show the existing approach of assessing students' English speaking skill at the tertiary level, specifically language institutions. The research aims to find out the problems of teachers' assessing the English language speaking skill and evaluate their students' sufferings at the Higher Educational Institution level.

**Key words:** assessment, speaking skill, CEFR, criteria, testing.

It's commonly known that CEFR is being gradually implemented in our country right after the adoption of the Presidential Decree Number 1875 which was signed on December 10, 2012. It has been more than 4 years that all educational institutions starting from primary schools and ending with higher educational institutions are busy with a hard work on enhancing the process of teaching and learning foreign languages. In these terms the approach of teaching English has been changed as well. Namely PRESETT program launched in all language institutions throughout Uzbekistan which is mainly based on communicative approach. Without knowing the assessment specifications of whatever subject is taught one cannot give a clear mark or grade to the student's performance. Therefore, teachers should not only be aware of any subject they are teaching and but also its criteria for assessment purposes.

The matter we would discuss further will consider the speaking assessment. Since the purpose of the test is diagnosis, the most significant competences needed for speaking have to be identified for speaking purposes.

Testing of speaking skill is necessary in language skills development because without testing, the process of achieving knowledge remains incomplete. It makes learners sincere enough to learn English profoundly. In Uzbekistan where English is the foreign language, students do not get that much opportunity to use their English speaking skills. Universities which prepare English Language specialists are the best places to implement what students have learned and where they can be assessed and

corrected by the teachers. In Uzbekistan context, and not only in our country, but also everywhere in the world, where English Language is learned as a foreign language, it is a common psychology that students learn language to get a good score in examinations, not to develop their language skills. Speaking assessment is equally important like the other skills of the language. Most teachers would accept that “if you want to encourage oral ability, then test oral ability” [2, 44]. If our students know they have to present something or give an oral test in English at the exam and their success in language use will depend on their performance, they will be serious enough to develop their speaking skills. As almost all important examinations do not include oral test, even the Universities which prepare English Language specialists both teachers and students neglect practicing oral English.

In fact, speaking is the most difficult skill to assess for many language teachers. It was mentioned, “there are not yet good answers to questions about the criteria for testing these skills and the weighing of these factors” [3, 46]. Another difficulty is, it is hard to assess a number of students within a short time because the examiner is put under pressure [1, 55]. Kitao & Kitao also mentioned that scoring is the most difficult as the assessment includes grammar, pronunciation, fluency, content, organization, and vocabulary.

The purpose of the speaking test is to assess the candidates’ ability to express opinions, give arguments and communicate their ideas in the areas of language for study, work and social life. The format of the test is 2 parts, in which in the first part there is a guided interview and structured monologue. Whereas in the part 2 there is a guided simulation (student to student interaction: discussion, decision-making, etc) and structured monologue. These two parts of the speaking test are not semantically linked. Speaking test is mainly assessed according to *Can Do* statements in CEFR specifications, i.e. CEFR descriptors, Language and Strategies.

In analytic scale, criteria described at level C1 of CEFR are composed of: Vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency and coherence and Communicative competence, whereas in IELTS speaking assessment we can observe four criteria without mentioning Communicative Competence.

A sample task for the second part of the speaking test where students are to ***describe, compare and contrast*** the pictures, whereas in IELTS speaking exam part 2 asks to ***describe or tell*** about one particular object, event, place, person and etc.

The major problems that we faced with while we enhanced it in 1<sup>st</sup> English Language faculty of the UWL in the initial stage of implementation of speaking test were the following ones:

- Teachers think that they know their students’ levels without consulting descriptors and samples.

- Teachers and in most cases students associate CEFR level with those they are familiar with. i.e. TOEFL, IELTS, ESOL exams like FCE, CAE and etc.
  - Teachers interpret the written words in descriptors differently;
- In order to organize the Speaking Exam in a good proper way, teachers should do the following.
- Select the appropriate speaking tasks for their students.
  - Design those tasks themselves using internet sources to create tests or relating to the books and other materials.
  - Create marking grids for students to be assessed.
  - And most importantly consult the CEFR, TOEFL or IELTS speaking descriptors.

The other type of problem that we had difficulty in taking the test is the way of organization of it. In other words, we can say the format of the speaking test. So far, we have tried two types of the test. The first one which has a resemblance to the IELTS test: parts 1, 2 and 3, where the first part deals with the topics related to personal life and second one dealing with one particular description of any event or object which is close to the student. The last part involves checking the inference, prediction and analytical skills. The other type was like ESOL examination, which is mainly based on more or less descriptive with the pictures and a structured monologue. It is hoped that the national format of the speaking test will be developed soon.

Assessment errors of the teachers could be:

- Using their own, private concepts and speaking criteria.
- Unconscious lead criterion made by teachers themselves like Accuracy/Fluency and etc.
- Severity towards the student.
- They sometimes refuse to give top grade mark to the student.
- Some teachers tend to put best mark for those students who are the acquaintances' children.

For the purpose of organizing speaking tests in a good way trainings should be held across countries which can train teachers on this very issue. So far, British Council has organized the training related to the assessment which helped significantly teachers from every regions of Uzbekistan for several times. With the help of networking teachers are assisting one another implementing the learned and gained experience. Nevertheless, a single training once a year cannot change these “hard issues”. After training there must be a quality control which can play a significant role in solving the problems dealing with the assessment.

All in all, it should be noted that the assessment should be based on the specific criteria. Teachers should assess all the sections' performance collectively on the three dimensions which are CEFR descriptors, language and strategies of the speaking assessment scale.

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