

Testing the Speaking Skill in the Foreign Language: An Analytic Study

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Introduction

Most methods in the foreign language tests tend to stress the discrete features of language proficiency of testees. That is, the focus is on testing the linguistic forms-vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, spelling, composition, reading comprehension, translation, etc. A major shortcoming of this process is that it is not completely integrative; it excludes listening comprehension and speaking from its components. (AL- Mutawa and Kailani, ١٩٨٩: ١٦١). Hence, foreign language learners at all levels of study complain about their inability to use the language orally; they cannot express themselves in the spoken form of the foreign language. It appears that the speaking skill is hard to foster as a habit in the mind of foreign language learners. This difficulty spreads to involve its testing procedures.

However, though many foreign language testers can assign overall grades for the speaking ability of their learners, such scores are, to a certain extent, subjective. In addition, if all formal tests are of pencil- paper variety, foreign language learners will soon realize that their preparation is most profitably spent on reading and writing. Accordingly, the acquisition of fluent speech habits is relegated to the status of a pleasant luxury; foreign language learners will no longer consider it an essential goal of their course. (Sensan, ٢٠٠٠: ١٨٦). Nevertheless, to ensure some objectivity for this test, foreign language teachers themselves must be such good models that they have the capacity to demonstrate the speaking skill as accurately as possible, i.e. just like the native speakers of the foreign language. Also, they must be fair enough in distributing the marks on the test items. Then, they should have enough knowledge and skill in the way to handle the speaking test. Therefore, this study tries to study and analyze the various items related to the oral skill tests in the foreign language, with a special focus on listening comprehension and speech production.

Motivating Interactive Speech

In order to motivate foreign language learners to make interactive speech, Brown and Race (١٩٩٧: ١٠٤) stipulate that the teacher should first avoid such obstacles:

- Pressure to conform.
- Authoritarian attitudes.
- Ridicule and similar attitudes such as domination of learners for any reasons, threats of any kind, fears which may be engendered to obtain right answers, etc. These can destroy the feeling of self-worth in learners.
- Rigidity which inhibits fluent speech in learners.

However, self-confidence in learners is one of the main criteria of giving them safety against any form of interruption while achieving oral communication. Foreign language learners will be confident if they are provided with opportunities for success in oral communication. Also, every learner should feel that his teacher and classmates deal with him as a person of worth, i.e. his opinions, comments, questions and answers, suggestions and other oral contributions are welcomed and regarded. (Egyud and

Glover, ٢٠٠١:٧٠-٧٦)

The Functional Language

To motivate learners to achieve oral communication in the foreign language, language functions might be emphasized over forms; a functional syllabus is used. (Fulcher and Davidson, ٢٠٠٧:٢٠٨-٢١١). In this regard, variety of forms are introduced for each function. Only the simpler forms would be introduced first; but as learners get more proficient in the target language, the functions are reintroduced and more complex forms are learned. Thus, in learning to make requests, for example, beginning learners might practise:

(١) Would you?

(٢) Could you.....?

Highly proficient learners might learn:

(٣) I wonder if you would mind....

Advanced foreign language learners may work, for example, at super-sentential or discourse level; they learn about cohesion and coherence. Thus, learners may be asked, for example, to recognize the lack of coherence between the first two sentences of the scrambled order, which did not appear connected in any meaningful way.

Oral Language Communication

According to Larsen-Freeman (٢٠٠٠: ١٢٥-١٢٦), in order to enable foreign language learners to achieve oral communication, the following demonstrations are worthy to consider:

- Language in oral real contexts is introduced; for example, a copy of a sports column from a recent newspaper could be presented.
- Motivation of learners by asking them to figure out the speaker's intentions.
- The target language is a vehicle for classroom oral communication . Hence, the teacher gives learners the directions for the activity in the foreign language.
- The emphasis is on the process of communication through manipulating various linguistic forms; for example, learners are asked to state the reporter's predictions in different words.
- Learners work with language at the discourse level; i.e. they learn about cohesion and coherence. For example , learners are asked to unscramble the sentences from the newspaper article .
- Learners exchange meaning . In this regard, they work in small groups to maximize the amount of communicative practice; for example, learners play a language game.
- Learners have the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions; for example , learners are asked to reveal their dealings about the predictions.
- Correction of errors is postponed since oral communication works on fluency . When a learner makes an error, the teacher and other learners ignore it.
- The teacher's main task is to establish situations that promote communication. Here, the teacher gives each group of learners a strip story and a task to perform.
- Oral communicative interaction encourages cooperative relationships among learners. For example, learners work with partners to predict what the next picture in the strip story will look like.
- The social context of the communicative event is essential in giving meaning to the utterances; for example, learners are to do role –plays as they imagine that they are

- all employees of the same company.
- Learners are enabled to use language forms properly. Here, the teacher reminds learners, for example, that one of them is playing the role of the boss and that they should remember this when addressing him.
 - The teacher acts as a facilitator in setting up communicative activities. The teacher moves from group to group offering advice and answering questions.
 - The learner is free in what and how to say. Learners suggest alternative forms they would use to restate a prediction to a colleague.
 - The grammar and vocabulary that learners learn flow from the functional, situational context and the roles of the interlocutors. For example, after a role-play is finished, learners are asked to elicit relevant vocabulary.
 - Learners are provided with opportunities and strategies in listening comprehension such as listening, as their homework, to a debate on the radio or watching it on T.V.

Interactive Oral Exercises

Rivers (١٩٨٧:٥٨) assert that interactive oral exercises in the target language class require the teacher to keep in mind these five items:

- ١- They should be so communicative that they are integrated into group activities, such as interviews, group games, dialogues and other forms of role play that encourage communication between learners or between the teacher and learners.
- ٢- They are so meaningful that they fully engage learner's minds and imagination. This means that learners carry out oral communication fluently without thinking about ideas raised.
- ٣- The limited choice of such exercises allow learner's attention to focus on the meaning of the activity. In most cases, this means making a choice between two forms such as:
 - The distinction between major and minor ideas.
 - Understanding the difference between /k/ and /g/.
 - Mastering present simple and present progressive.
- ٤- They should be expressive. Learners are encouraged to adopt the accent, intonation and pronunciation of native speakers as completely as possible. Also, interactive exercises should present full range of emotions in order to encourage learners to dramatize the foreign language.
- ٥- They should be integrated with other kinds of exercises: repetition, substitution, pattern practice, which constitute effective tools for the sake of variety. Here, effective oral communication can be attained by communicating meaningful messages even in limited contexts.

Listening Comprehension Tests

The skill in listening requires proficiency in three areas: discrimination, retention and comprehension. The main object of a listening comprehension test is to evaluate the learners' ability to discriminate phonemes, to recognize stress and intonation patterns, and to retain what they have heard. In conversation, however, understanding the foreign language requires knowledge of vocabulary and grammar which may be acquired orally.

A marked comprehension problem for the foreign language arises from difference between natural and stylized speech. Newscasters, in particular, employ a highly stylized delivery. Movies and television programs in the foreign language are often hard to

understand. In Intermediate and advanced courses , taped radio broadcasts and films in the foreign language can provide a basis for listening comprehension tests. An effort should be made to familiarize advanced learners with the variations of spoken language . For example , in English , jeetjet looks like nonsense when seen on the printed page; but when read aloud with a rising intonation, one would understand Did you eat yet? Thus, all languages have rapid forms of speech, which can serve as the basis for valid comprehension tests . Moreover, when foreign language learners distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable pronunciation, they may be expected to profit from laboratory sessions during which they make and play recordings of their own voices (Lee, ١٩٨٥:٥٤).

A wide variety of oral tests may be adopted so that teachers can assess learners' comprehension of key lexical terms:

- Listening comprehension and body movement.

- Simple commands.
- Discrimination of commands.

- Listening comprehension and drawing.

- Simple version.
- Complex version.

- Comprehension ease.

- True-false: verbal.
- True- false: Pictures.
- Telling the time.
- Numbers.

- Key-word comprehension.

- Brief dialogue.
- Situation.
- Question- answer.
- Statement- rejoinder.
- Completion.

- **False cognates.** Words with similar forms in the native language and target language but with different meanings are given. Then, foreign language learners are asked to discriminate among these words.

- Passage comprehension .

- Pure test: true- false.
- Pure test: question- answer.
- Pure test: drawing.
- Hybrid test: true- false.

The test can be carried out in the following way: You will hear the passage once; then, turn to your answer booklet; you will see a series of statements referring to the passage ; decide whether each statement is true or false. Advanced learners generally do not find it too difficult to adapt to the measured difficulty of a lecture in formal speech, but certain rhetorical conventions or unfamiliar constructions may impose problems. In this regard, Chastain (١٩٧٩:١٧٤) stipulates that the best way to evaluate the learner's ability to understand the formal language is through the use of a recording of a speech or lecture. Thus, listening comprehension may be assessed in the following ways:

-Questions. A tape may be stopped at intervals and questions are asked on the

preceding portion. Another possibility is to allow learners to make notes which they may consult in answering the questions.

-**Notes.** More advanced foreign language learners may be asked to take notes in outline forms. This test evaluates only learners' note-taking.

- **Newscasts.** Radio and T.V. newscasters are often very difficult to understand because of their stylized delivery . The foreign language teacher should obtain a recording of alive newscast. Then, learner's; comprehension would be measured as in (٢) above.

-**Rapid conversation.** Often, advanced foreign language learners who have been able to get along satisfactorily at school are disappointed when traveling abroad owing to their inability to understand rapid conversation. If the foreign language teacher is able to obtain recordings of conversation between native speakers, these may be used in the classroom. Thus, a recorded conversation may become the basis for a test using the items described above. To reinforce correct responses and to verify the learners' comprehension of more measured speech, the same conversation could be replayed a second time but with the participants enunciating more distinctly. The same questions could be asked twice and the results compared.

However, the basic problem in listening comprehension tests involves the need to any external evidence that learners have understood what they have heard. For example , one participant in a conversation may murmur "uhuh" while another is speaking because he wishes to indicate that he agrees with what the other is saying. It is worthy to mention , here, that a tester cannot depend fully on either, i.e., learners who always say "yes" and those who always "sigh" or say "uhuh", as an indication of their understanding of what they have heard. Accordingly, in testing the comprehension of the spoken language, the focus should be on understanding the communication event which the learner has listened to.

Other listening comprehension tests may take the following forms as cited by (Al-Mutawa and Kailani, ١٩٨٩: ١٦٢):

- **Listen and point.** The teacher shows the class various pictures. He, then, describes one of the pictures , asking learners to distinguish it from others.

- **Listen and organize.** Learners listen to an appropriate text. They, then, state the meaning of certain vocabulary items, The form of items, whether singular or plural, count or non-count, or tenses of verbs whether present , past or future , etc.

- **Listen and write.** The teacher provides the class with a dialogue, a story or a conversation. learners listen and answer the questions about the content.

- **Listen and answer .** The teacher gives oral messages or conveys some information instructions, etc. The learners answer the questions by means of which the teacher determines how much they have understood.

- **Participate and be tested.** The learners may participate in an oral activity (e.g. an interview, a role-play or a conversation). The learners can then be tested directly during the activity . The teacher observes the quality of interaction through gestures, questions, comments and the like.

Speech Production Tests

A speech production test is a difficult task as it takes more time to administer, particularly to a large class, than commonly –used discrete point linguistic tests. This reason, i.e. lack of time, may explain why teachers of the foreign language avoid

examinations of oral fluency and the ability to communicate ideas appropriately . Thus, the ability to speak is tested through an overall impression in most cases (Biggs, ٢٠٠٣:١٧٧). This way seems more practical as the teacher need not designate a special day or time for oral fluency exams. By observing learners' interaction and participation in class, he can judge their oral ability. However, the following testing techniques might be of some help in this regard (Weir, ١٩٩٠:٧٥-٧٩):

- Learners' participation in a dialogue , a debate, a classroom conversation, etc.
- learners' narration, telling jokes , recounting events, giving instructions, talking about familiar topics, etc. for a limited period of time.
- Learners' engagement in formal talks or speeches such as class reports, panels, arguments, etc.
- Learners may be asked questions of general interest to which they answer in two or more sentences.
- Learners may be interviewed by the teacher who asks wh-questions about topics and situations the learners have been dealing with. However, one can point out very briefly the role played by the teacher in order to enhance speech production of learners. These recommendations are worthy to consider: elicit speech which has a purpose, elicit extended chunks of speech, elicit structured or organized speech, control the input, and quantify the notion of communicative effectiveness.

Practical Requirements

Here, the teacher should maintain a test record of learners' spoken performance. Thus, he needs to make an informal chart with headings reflecting those aspects of learners' speech which the teacher feels confident of measuring . This may take the form below:

Date Type of Speech Required Vocabulary Fluency Information Transfer

Some of the categories shown above, i.e. fluency, for example, will have to be assessed through subjective judgment by the tester. It is usually thought that the subjective judgments are unreliable and liable to substantial varieties . However, such judgment made by the teacher who is the best judge of what his own learners have been taught can provide a valid basis for informal testing. In this regard, Brown and Yule(١٩٨٣: ١٠٤-١٠٥) state that" we must emphasize , however , that we do not suggest that the objective approach should override the teacher's subjective assessment. The two types of assessments should be used to arrive at a fuller characterization of the student's performance".

Learner's Tape

Since most assessment of the spoken form is done as the foreign language learner speaks, the taped performance of the learner can be kept as evidence to support the teacher's judgment . As a result, if the learner records a number of performances on the same tape over a period of weeks or months, the teacher can check over those performances and gain an impression of whether the learner has improved or not. The taped record may also be used more immediately for diagnostic purposes. If the teacher gets the impression that a particular learner seems to be making a consistent error of same sort, then he can listen to the tape for specific examples. Having identified some examples, he can illustrate the problem of the particular learner and suggest ways in which the learners may overcome the identified difficulty. Thus, keeping a taped record

of samples of learner's spoken form production is crucial in any serious approach to the assessment of spoken language. (Macintosh, ١٩٧٤: ٦٨).

Type of Material Recorded

Clearly, it would be a waste of time and effort to record every speech which emanates from the learner . Rather, the learner should be prepared to talk, and be recorded on a limited number of occasions during a session. He should also be required to produce talk in different modes and not to be allowed to produce the story, for example, on every occasion . It is worthy to suggest , here, that a straight description is easier, in some sense, than telling a story. Also, telling a story is easier than a justification of an opinion.

This is a rather general guide to level of difficulty . Naturally , a short narrative involving a single character and only two or three events may be easier than a lengthy description covering many details and relationships. Hence, one of the key problems in testing, with some constancy of criteria, is that one learner describing a painting, another describing the town he comes from, another describing his car, etc. They are all producing description but the criteria of testing, which are applied , may differ according to the subject matter.

Task Types

The practical requirement met by the task-based approach to the testing of speech production is that there should be some constancy of elicitation input, i.e. every learner is asked to do the same thing. Here, the focus is on the using of the spoken form rather than the use of any grammatical structures or any specific vocabulary items. Those structures and words the learner chooses to use must be adequate for the performance of the task.

The type of speech required in producing a description or a set of instructions is essentially an account of fixed relationships. For example, in expressing an opinion, there tends to be quite a different set of relationships between one part of what is being talked about and the next. Such aspects of task types can be summarized below:

- Static relationships:

- Describing an object or a photograph.
- Instructing someone to draw a diagram.
- Instructing someone to assemble a piece of equipment.
- Describing how a number of objects are to be arranged.
- Giving route direction.

- Dynamic relationships:

- story- telling.
- Giving an eye-witness account.

- Abstract relationships:

- Opinion expressing.
- Justifying a course of action.

It becomes clear that the objects to be tested can range from the everyday objects in the classroom to quite unfamiliar ones (Coombe et.al, ٢٠٠٧:١١٨-١٢٦).

Information Gap

In eliciting speech production for testing, there should be a listener who does not have the information which the speaker has, and who in turn needs that information. This can be simply achieved by having another learner take the role of a listener. In his role as a listener, the second learner also has some task to perform, which depends upon

receiving of the information from the speaker. For example, the speaker is provided with a simple drawing of a line, a square and a triangle on a page. The listener cannot see the drawing , but is provided with a pen and a sheet of blank paper. A small but identifiable information gap has been created . The speaker's task is to instruct the listener to reproduce, as accurately as possible, the drawing which he can see, but the listener cannot. This technique can be used with one learner speaking and the rest of the class as listeners (Pryse, ١٩٨٣: ٢٦).

As shown above, there are two basic practical requirements in the assessment of speech production. There should be a set of task types and there should be an information gap between what the speaker knows and what his listener knows. Given these two elements, the required information scoring procedure is relatively straightforward.

Intonation Tests

Learners of the foreign language often transfer the intonation of their native language to the foreign language. Thus, in classroom testing , the teacher must be principally concerned with two major types of intonation: those that distinguish the target language from the native language of learners and those that connote special meaning in the target language . However, we can suggest that one major advantage of the dialogue- approach to language learning is that the learner acquires an accurate conversational intonation from the beginning of his instruction. The areas in which the learner performance should be tested are as follows:

Mimicry. The learners repeat sentences after the teacher or after a model on tape. Performance is graded as acceptable or unacceptable. Such tests are particularly useful with beginning learners.

Memorization. In reciting materials or dialogues formerly studied in class or in the laboratory, learners generally use proper intonation. Performance is graded as acceptable or unacceptable.

Oral Cue. A response is elicited either by question or through a direction. Since the learner tends to concentrate on the content of his response, the teacher can readily judge whether the information patterns of the target language has become habits or whether the learner reverts to the patterns of his native language when under stress.

Visual Cue. Learners may be asked by the tester to describe what they can see and explain what they think is happening in a picture . Sample questions in English, for example, are as follows:

(٤) What can you see in the picture?

(٥) Would you be able to see a sight like this in your country? if not, why not?

(٦) What do you think about the way the people are dressed?

However, this test is less objective because different learners will use different sentence structures. Again , it is possible to evaluate the learner's general intonation pattern on the following criteria:

- Intonation within word groups.
- Intonation at the end of word groups.
- Final intonation in declarative sentences.

Stress Tests

Since most polysyllabic words in English, for example, carry not only primary

stress, but also secondary and weak stresses, English speaking learners can usually hear and produce stress easily in other languages. However, English speaking learners may face these stress problems:

- In a weak stress position, most English vowels are pronounced identically , regardless of their spelling.

- A misplaced stress will render the word incomprehensible to the native speaker of the language, e.g.

English : student German : Student Arabic: /tilmiiz/.

- Accordingly, a different problem may arise when the distribution of stressed syllables in the mother tongue does not correspond with that in English. (Widdowson, ١٩٧٩: ٨٢).

Moreover, because of its varied spellings, irregular stress patterns, and complex intonation, English tends to written tests of this type. These tests of oral English are:

-Comparing sounds.

- Same vs. different : two words.

Compare the underlined letters. If they represent the same sound, mark A; if they represent different sounds, mark B.

-Same vs. different : three words.

Compare the sounds of the underlined letters; on your answer sheet, indicate which two words contain underlined letters with the same sound.

-Rhymes: two words.

Compare the two words and indicate whether they rhyme with each other; do not consider a visual rhyme, but only the sounds of the words. Mark A if they rhyme ; mark B if they do not rhyme.

-Rhyme : three words.

Compare the sounds of the three words. In your answer sheet, indicate which two words of the group rhyme with each other.

- Comparing sounds: omitted letters.

In this type of item, the sounds to be compared are left blank.

Consequently, the key word must be presented in a clear content so that the problem of guessing does not interfere with the learner's performance.

- Simple version. On your answer sheet, indicate in which words the omitted letters represent identical sounds. Here, in some cases, pictures may be included for the sake of clarity.

- Complex version. On your answer sheet, indicate which word or words contain underlined letters that sound the same as the letters omitted in the original sentence.

- Locating stress. On your answer sheet, indicate which syllable receives the primary stress.

- Comparing stress. On your answer sheet , mark the letters of the two words which have the same stress pattern.

- Comparing intonation. Decide whether the intonation patterns of the two sentences are the same or different . On your answer sheet, indicate your answer as follows:

A= Same. B= Different.

(Pryse, ١٩٨٣: ٧٣)

Directed Speaking Tests

Valette (١٩٦٧:٧٩) stipulates that "directed speaking tests measure the ease and

accuracy with which the learner handles the patterns of the target language". Here, only the use of structure and syntax can be evaluated. Pronunciation can be judged if it conveys the meaning of the response. Then, directed speaking tests can take the forms below:

- **Multiple substitution.** The learner replaces one element in the sentence with another and is consequently obliged to affect other change. Items are scored as either correct or incorrect for each required modification. In addition, the response might receive a point for being fluent even though the changing elements have all been incorrectly handled.

- **Modified substitution .** The learner must modify the new element before substituting it in the key sentence.

- **Replacement .** The learner replaces a noun or a phrase with an appropriate pronoun.

- **Transformation.** The learner changes a sentence according to precise instructions, i.e., to plural, passive, negative, interrogative, verb forms, etc.

- **Following commands .** This type parallels the classroom directed dialogue.

- **Joining sentences .** The learner's ability to use conjunctions and relative pronouns as well as his understanding of verb tenses and word order may be assessed with the following item type. Given two independent statements, the learner is asked to join them into one complex or compound sentence.

- **Directed questions and answers.** In the question- answer speaking test, the learner is told what kind of response to give. Although the learner is not completely free to choose his answers in such a directed test, he often enjoys such items because they are so closely approximate a real conversational situation.

- **Numbers.** Testing the numbers can usually be done by means of a straight question- answer technique. Here, one can depend on conversation in a railway station, a restaurant or in a store. In this regard, a chart could be prepared beforehand clearly indicating specific fares and prices.

- **Telling time.** With the aid of a large clock with movable hands, the tester may ask each testee to give the time orally. However, if a large timetable is available, questions may be asked orally on arrivals and departures of trains or planes, length of trips, length of stops in various cities on the route, etc.

- **Statement and rejoinder.** In a statement – rejoinder item, the teacher speaks the sentence and then indicates by a gesture or a facial expression the type of reaction the learner is to manifest. Here, not only the choice of the rejoinder, but also the promptness of the response and the appropriateness of the intonation may be scored. This type of informal classroom tests affords the more creative learners an opportunity to show their inventiveness and thus encourages other learners to listen to the answer.

- **Directed conversation.** Here, two or more learners are assigned roles and given precise directions as to the type of conversation they are to engage in.

- **Oral translation.** The English sentence, in this regard, is spoken once rapidly and the learner gives the target –language equivalent as quickly and as fluently as possible. Since emphasis is on equivalent structures, the immediate learner may be given some leeway in expression. Dialogue sentences may be modified in order to evaluate the learner's ability to use structures in a variety of ways. The learner's responses should be scored for their rapidity and fluency as well as their accuracy.

-Picture writing. Through the technique of picture writing, it is possible to bypass both the native language and the skills of listening and reading in the target language and still elicit specific spoken responses. Whole ideas are represented through simple line drawings called ideograms. Obviously, the learners will have to be familiar with the symbols before taking the test, (Richards and Rodgers, ٢٠٠١: ١٠١).

Free Response Tests

Under this title, the learner is free to talk about whatever he wishes for a stated period of time. Usually, one or two minutes are allowed for each learner to prepare his response. Generally speaking, we deal with two types of tests:

- Picture

The teacher can provide a picture or a series of pictures that even those learners who suddenly can think of nothing to say on a speaking test will have in front of them a subject for conversation. The learner may describe the objects or the action taking place in the picture. Also, he might tell a story merely suggested by the pictorial aid. Such a test may be scored on vocabulary, structure, fluency, pronunciation and intonation. In quizzes, however, it is preferable to score only two or three aspects of the learner performance.

-Conversation

It is very common that the most credible or natural type of the speaking test is a free conversation with the teacher or with another qualified speaker. In the latter case, it is better to have the speaker talk with each learner for several minutes. The teacher should try to remain as unobtrusive as possible, perhaps sitting behind the learner. While the speaker encourages the learner to express himself, the teacher is free to concentrate on scoring the learner performance objectively. It is worthy to say that the tester (a teacher or a qualified speaker) should realize that his primary functions are putting the learner at ease, encouraging him to speak and helping him out when necessary (Lee, ١٩٨٥: ٦١). Moreover, learners can be given greater opportunities to orally construct their messages, such as responding to brief written messages, to listen to announcements and extract specific points of information or to exchange information with a fellow learner (Hedge, ٢٠٠٠: ٣٨٣)

Comprehensive Speaking Tests

At the end of semester, or often at mid terms, it is essential to have a fairly long examination. If one of the announced objectives of the course is speaking, then a speaking test should be considered part of the mid- term or final. If one-fourth of the emphasis of the course has been devoted to the development of the speaking skill, then one-fourth of the final exam grade should depend on the speaking test. However, since the speaking test is designed to evaluate individual performance, it must be administered to learners one-by-one or to a group in the language lab if recording equipment is available. Generally, the speaking test is given priority to the rest of the tests, but all learners should be told that their speaking performance constitutes a part of the final exam. The comprehensive speaking test consists of several sections in which the various aspects of the speaking skill are evaluated. If desired, written-answer speaking test items may be included in the written section of the examination. Here is a sample outline of the sections in a semester final:

Written of pronunciation and stress	٢٠٪
Pronunciation items	٢٠٪

Directed responses	٤٠٪
Free responses	٢٠٪

(Baker, ١٩٨٩:٧-١٠)

Interview

An interview can be seen as a process of interaction between persons. Here, one should reconsider both the interviewer and the interviewee in interaction. In this regard, we may also need to emphasize the idea of selection and training of interviewers, of methods of conducting the interview, and of the possibility of selecting interviewees. In addition, an interview may have any one or all of the information and modifying behavior (Brigham and Moore, ١٩٦٦:٢٦٥).

However, the core of the interview, in our paper, is a conversation between two or more learners, aimed at exchanging meanings in addition to the satisfaction in the conversation itself. Thus, there is give-and-take between the interviewer and the interviewee – the various means of communications involved in the interview are spoken words, gestures, expressions, facial expressions, etc. Bugental (١٩٥٤: ٥٣٥) has designed a program of research to develop techniques for the objective description of interviewing which he has named "explicit analysis". He proposes these five descriptive dimensions:

-**Topical content.** What is talked about.

-**Idea-feeling balance.** Relative amount of attention to ideas and to feelings in what is talked about?

- **Focus .** How specifically is it spoken of?

-**Intensity.** How much does the speaker attempt to manipulate what will be said in response?

-**Concurrence.** How well does each party to the interview agree with the other in relation to each dimension?

Again, Brown and Yule (١٩٨٣:١٠٢) state that the oral dimension of English speech tests may be based on the general impression of how well learners benefit from the interview in which the tester asks them questions or prompts the testees to talk on certain topics. While the tester also pays attention to aspects as accent, grammar, vocabulary and fluency on the testee's speech, the overall score is often expressed in terms whether the testees are able to satisfy certain linguistic, educational, social or work requirements.

Then, Carroll and Hall (١٩٨٥: ٥٠) reveal the importance of the atmosphere of interview when they assert that: "Instead of the rather uneasy dialogue between the interrogator(Interviewer) and his victim (interviewee), we have friendly discussions between pairs or groups of testees who have been given a specific role with definite tasks to carry out". It appears that the first prerequisite in carrying out an oral interaction test is to establish a friendly and encouraging atmosphere. Then, to achieve such an effective interview, Carroll & Hall (Ibid) suggest that the assessment, in this regard, be divided into three phases:

- **Warm up.** To make acquaintance of the interviewee and encourage him to perform well.

- **Main task.** A suitable task is presented to each interviewee and an assessment of their oral competence is made.

- **Round up.** When any loose ends are tied up, suggested ways towards a final assessment are followed and the participant is especially encouraged to contribute his own individual views on the topics discussed and on the nature of his test.

The above three phases can be undertaken both in the face-to face interview and in a group discussion. However, the interview is inherently the more stressful situation as the testee is the focus of all attention and has no means of escaping this pressure. When a group of testees, on the other hand, is carrying out a common task, the focus will shift from person to person during the interview ; i.e., when addressed among his colleagues , the interviewee will attract the attention of his colleagues rather than that of the interviewer.

Conclusion

Testing the discrete features of the foreign language individually or collectively , i.e. vocabulary , grammar, pronunciation, spelling, composition, reading comprehension, translation, etc, is not an integrative orientation in the language assessment unless it includes other features of the oral skills represented by listening comprehension and speaking. Frankly speaking, foreign language learners still allot little attention and consideration to both listening comprehension and speaking skills since they believe that their capacity in such skills are subjectively assessed.

Various procedures, means and devices concerning how to effectively motivate foreign language learners to achieve oral communication through the real use of the language have to be adopted . This shifts the attention of specialists in foreign language teaching to the nature of interactive oral exercises that facilitate the process of carrying out real communication among learners inside and outside language classes.

Foreign language learners should, then, be enabled to master first the main skills in listening comprehension: discrimination, retention and comprehension. Thus, proficient language testers should have enough experience in various kinds of oral tests that evaluate learners' comprehension of key lexical terms as well as other listening comprehension items.

Moreover, foreign language testers should have considerable efficiency and proficiency in exploiting the various techniques used in testing the speech production of their learners, particularly the type of material, task types, information gaps, intonation tests, stress tests, directed speaking tests, free response tests, comprehensive speaking tests and the interview.

Finally, the main concern of every foreign language teacher is to test the speaking skill of learners with high motivation , objectivity and seriousness. Teachers and testers, in this respect, should be good models in using the foreign language orally , and in turn should demonstrate high ability in encouraging their learners to speak the language as fluently as possible. Accordingly , the value of teaching and learning the foreign language in its spoken form as well as the oral tests made in this respect will ever be increasing.

Appendix

Sample Questions on Speaking Tests in Written English Form

Q.١. Answer these questions:

- ١- What is the date today?
- ٢- Why did you join the college?

Q.٢. Write a situational dialogue on the following:

- ١- At a Doctor's Surgery.
- ٢- Booking Airline Tickets.

Q.٣. Complete the following:

١- I'm hungry . Can you

٢-I'd like to know if

Q.٤. Give another role for the following:

١.

A. What's wrong with him?

B.....?

٢.

A.?

B. No, I'm trying to find a blue shirt, size forty.

Q.٥. Change the following questions to more polite forms:

١- How much milk do you want?

٢- Which direction is the college of education?

Q.٦. Make sentences out of the following:

Can't they, I wonder , Shall I, Have you.

Q.٧. Change the following to different structures with equivalent meanings:

١- Please, reserve me a two-roomed suite.

٢- It's no distance at all.

Q.٨. Give the equivalent meaning for the following expressions:

١- The best part of the week.

٢- The next stop but one.

Q.٩. Fill in the blanks with the most suitable words:

١- Would you like some coffee?

Yes, I'd like.....(much, many, any)

٢- I slept in the room.....the red carpet. (in, with, at)

Q.١٠. Do as required:

١- It is dark. You can't find the way. (Use too...to).

٢- You can see him if it is urgent. (Use unless).

Q.١١. In one sentence , write what could be said:

١- You ask about the way to the airport.

٢- You describe what you feel to the doctor.

Q.١٢. Fill in the blank with one word only:

١- Did you order else?

٢- This room is the in the first floor.

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