

# SPOKEN PRODUCTION SKILLS OF EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS: ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

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*У статті узагальнено сучасні вимоги до усного інішомовного монологічного мовлення згідно із Загальноєвропейськими рекомендаціями з мовної освіти, а також запропоновано сукупність критеріїв оцінювання одного з жанрів такого мовлення.*

*Ключові слова: загальний рівень володіння мовою, критерії оцінювання, рецепція мовлення, продукція, інтеракція, медіація, усне продукування мовлення, виконання комунікативного завдання, використання мови.*

*The paper gives an overview of descriptors for spoken production as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference. A set of assessment criteria for spoken production skills is offered.*

*Key words: overall language proficiency, assessment criteria, reception, production, interaction, mediation, spoken production, task fulfillment, language use.*

Assessment is considered to be an integral part of the English Language Development Curriculum for Pedagogical (Teacher Training) Universities in Ukraine [1: 30]. Speaking skills

assessment is regarded as essential component of measuring the EFL learners' *overall* language proficiency. Therefore, identifying the adequate set of assessment criteria for these skills is all the more challenging and important.

A brief survey of the findings of researchers working in the field of language testing/assessment shows that the testing of speaking is widely regarded as the most challenging of all language tests to prepare, administer and score [6: 147]. Possible reasons for speaking skills assessment being so different from other skills testing (e.g. reading or listening) should be sought for in the nature of the speaking skill itself which is very difficult to define [5: 31]. Fluency, accuracy, amount of information conveyed, quickness of response and other qualities of speech are difficult to define, though the speakers' optimum oral performance is heavily dependent on them.

The **purpose** of this paper is to suggest a set of criteria which should provide for valid and reliable evaluation of EFL senior students' achievements in spoken production.

The practical aim of the Curriculum for the English Language Development [1] is "to develop the trainees' competence and fluency in English so that they can become good models of effective communication, by forming and consolidating their linguistic, communicative and socio-cultural knowledge and skills" [ibid.: 22]. In the broadest sense, communicative competence can be defined as the ability to interact interpersonally in ways that ensure the achievement of one's goals and the satisfaction of both interactants [4: 61].

The repertoire of a competent communicator consists of the following integral parts (but not limited to): 1) the language resources used to create discourse; 2) the language skills used to process spoken discourse; 3) the discourse knowledge used to interpret how the meaningful, unified and purposive language as an act of communication is created; 4) the knowledge of the functions of utterances used to understand utterances as social acts; 5) the pragmatic knowledge used to interpret the speaker meaning and the contextual meaning; 6) the knowledge of maxims of oral interaction: the cooperative principle, politeness/ facework used to cooperate with each other and maintain solidarity while communicating; 7) the knowledge how to participate in oral interaction: turn taking, adjacency pairs, preference, repair used to maintain the flow of speech in communication and tackle possible communication problems; 8) the knowledge of social and cultural norms used to produce discourse appropriately with reference to formality, setting and other contextually defined choices; 9) the knowledge of cultural communicative preferences used to structure persuasive messages [3: 19-24].

Michael Byram claims that communicative competence is a model of the following six competences: 1) linguistic competence: the ability to produce and interpret meaningful utterances which are formed in accordance with the rules of the language concerned and bear their conventional meaning ... that meaning which native speakers would normally attach to an utterance when used in isolation; 2) sociolinguistic competence: the awareness of ways in which the choice of language forms ... is determined by such conditions as setting, relationship between communication partners, communicative intention, <...> sociolinguistic competence covers the relation between linguistic signals and their contextual — or situational — meaning; 3) discourse competence: the ability to use appropriate strategies in the construction and interpretation of texts; 4) strategic competence: when communication is difficult we have to find ways of 'getting our meaning across' or of 'finding out what somebody means'; these are communication strategies, such as rephrasing, asking for clarification etc.; 5) socio-cultural competence: every language is situated in a sociocultural context and implies the use of a particular reference frame which is partly different from that of the foreign language learner; socio-cultural competence presupposes a certain degree of familiarity with that context; 6) social competence: involves both the will and the skill to interact with others, involving motivation, attitude, self-confidence, empathy and the ability to handle social situations [2: 10].

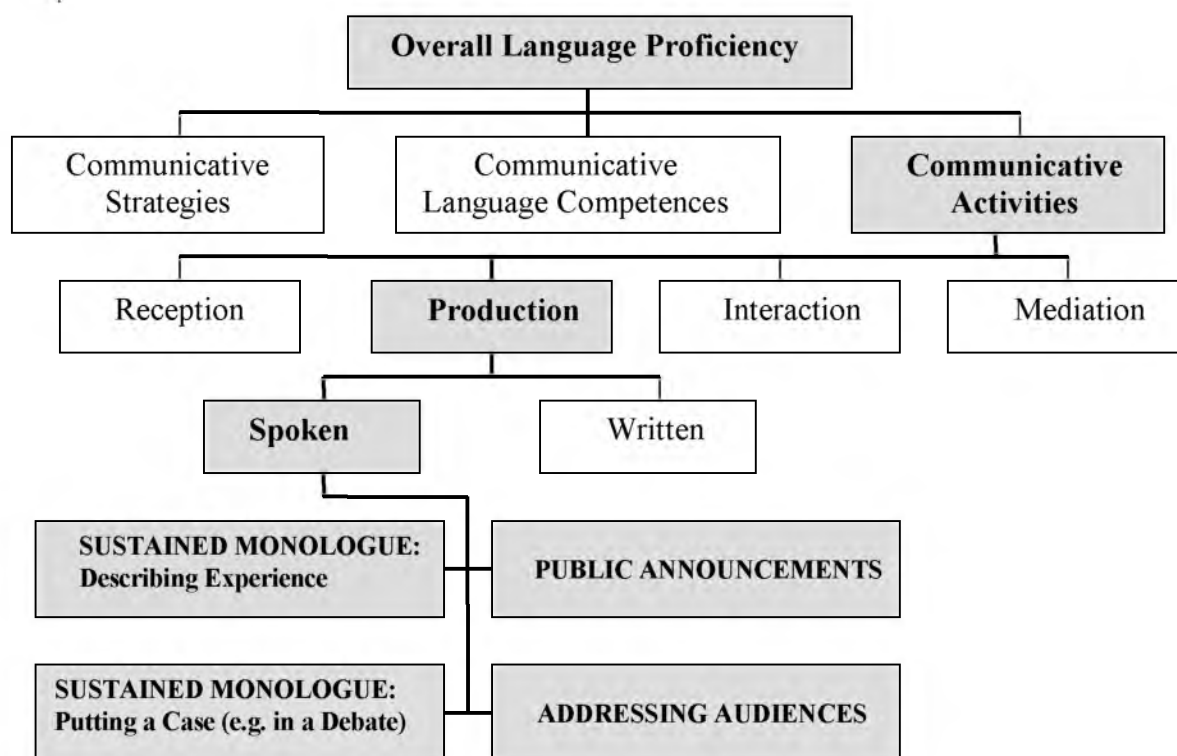
In The Common European Framework of Reference /CEFR [7], communicative competence is interpreted in terms of knowledge and it includes three basic components – language competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence. The CEFR is based on an action-oriented approach and views users and learners of a language as members of society who may wish to accomplish tasks in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action: <... Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by

persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of competences, both general and in particular communicative language competences. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various conditions and under various constraints to engage in language activities involving language processes to produce and/or receive texts in relation to themes in specific domains, activating those strategies which seem most appropriate for carrying out the tasks to be accomplished ... > [7: 32].

The CEFR describe competence mainly along two broad dimensions: the **quantity** dimension which includes the number of tasks users/ learners can perform successfully by language use, in what number of contexts, in relation to what number of themes, domains etc., and the **quality** dimension, i.e. how effectively and efficiently the users/ learners can achieve their goals through language use [7: 32].

The **quantity dimension** branches out from overall language proficiency into “Communicative Activities”. Four main types of activities are distinguished: reception, production, interaction, and mediation. In Diagram 1 the Production branch is worked out in more detail. Within Production a spoken and a written branch are distinguished. Finally within the spoken branch several contexts of language use are presented. For each of the boxes in the diagram descriptive scales are available in the CEFR.

In the area of **spoken production**, the CEFR defines a list of the following discourse modes (genres) particularly relevant to the occupational and educational domains: 1) SUSTAINED MONOLOGUE (Describing Experience); 2) SUSTAINED MONOLOGUE (Putting a Case, e.g. in a Debate); 3) PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS; 4) ADDRESSING AUDIENCES (see Diagram 1) [7; 8].



**Diagram 1. Overall Language Proficiency components**

Each of the above mentioned discourse modes has their own descriptors. **SUSTAINED MONOLOGUE (Describing Experience)**: the speaker a) can give clear, smoothly flowing, elaborate and often memorable descriptions; b) can give clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects; c) can give elaborate descriptions and narratives, integrating sub themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion. **SUSTAINED MONOLOGUE (Putting a Case, e.g. in a Debate)**: the speaker can develop an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of

significant points, and relevant supporting detail. PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS: the speaker can deliver announcements fluently, almost effortlessly, using stress and intonation to convey finer shades of meaning precisely. ADDRESSING AUDIENCES (making a presentation on a theme/topic): the speaker a) can present a complex topic confidently and articulately to an audience unfamiliar with it, structuring and adapting the talk flexibly to meet the audience's needs; b) can handle difficult and even hostile questioning; c) can give a clear, well-structured presentation of a complex subject, expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples.

The CEFR defines the following four **qualitative aspects** of spoken language [8]:

1) RANGE: <...“the speaker a) shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity; b) also has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms; c) has a good command of a broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express him/ herself clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general, academic, professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say...>”.

2) ACCURACY: <...”the speaker: a) maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions); b) consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare, difficult to spot and generally corrected when they do occur...>”.

3) FLUENCY: the speaker a) “ <...> can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it; b) can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly; c) only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language<...>”.

4) COHERENCE: the speaker: a) “ <...>can create coherent and cohesive discourse making full and appropriate use of a variety of organisational patterns and a wide range of connectors and other cohesive devices: b) can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices<...>”.

On taking into account the above presented quantitative and qualitative characteristics of spoken production, a set of its assessment criteria can be devised which can be structured into two broad groups. Learners can be assessed on their spoken production performance in relation to 1) task fulfillment, and 2) language use (See the sample scale in Table 1 below).

Task Fulfillment means organizing both what is said, and how it is said, with regard to quantity, quality, relevance and clarity of information. Task Fulfillment includes Organization of speech, Methods of delivery, and Style of delivery. Organization of speech demonstrates the speaker's sub-skills in addressing the audience, revealing the topic of speech and outlining its most relevant information blocks. Organizing his/her speech appropriately, the speaker should demonstrate the knowledge of the factual information on the theme and use supporting materials (examples, statistics, quotations, testimony) which create the speaker credibility and make the speech persuasive. The speaker should also demonstrate his/her ability: a) to speak logically, i.e. to convey thoughts in explicit, clear manner, sticking to the outline of speech, keeping the main points separate; b) to create a well-structured message; c) to make a relevant conclusion etc (See Table 1).

In case of addressing audiences discourse mode, the speaker should use extemporaneous speaking style demonstrating fluency that involves avoiding too much repetition, self-correction or excessive hesitation. Reading from manuscript or reciting from memory in this discourse mode are evaluated as weak points of spoken production. Appropriate style of delivery presupposes the use of adequate kinesics, being audience-sensitive and avoiding mannerisms.

Language use means (a) accuracy of language; (b) appropriacy of language use; (c) range of vocabulary and grammatical structures. Pronunciation means (a) quality of sounds; (b) ability to use stress, rhythm and intonation appropriately; (c) ability to use a variety of speech patterns in longer utterances.

The speaker's actual scores on each criterion are totaled. The total scores for the spoken production task are added. The result is the speaker's grade/ mark for this genre of spoken production. The maximum grade will be 5 or the trainer can assign different scores.

Table 1.

**SPOKEN PRODUCTION GRADING/ MARKING SHEET  
(ADDRESSING AUDIENCE: PRESENTATION)**

№	Assessment criteria	Highest points	Points scored
<b>A. TASK FULLFUILMENT</b> highest number of points = <b>3.0</b>			
<b>1 ORGANIZATION of SPEECH</b> highest points = <b>2.5</b>			
	1.1. The speaker <b>addresses the audience</b> , and reveals the <b>topic</b> of speech	0.1	
	1.2 The speaker <b>previews the body of speech</b> by presenting its <b>outline</b> (e.g. <i>Today I am going to speak about/of...</i> , <i>Firstly, I will address the problem ...</i> )	0.2	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1.3. The speaker demonstrates <b>the knowledge of the factual information</b> on the theme and uses <b>supporting materials</b> : 1) <i>examples</i> , 2) <i>statistics</i> , 3) <i>quotations, testimony</i>	0.5	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1.4. The speaker demonstrates his/her ability to <b>speak logically</b> , i.e. to convey thoughts in explicit, clear manner, sticking to the <b>outline</b> of speech, <b>keeping</b> the main points separate: <b>EXPLANATION SKILLS</b>	0.5	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1.5. The speaker demonstrates <b>well-structured, cohesive speech</b> : uses attention attraction markers, internal summaries, signals the end of speech ( <i>My presentation is over. Thank you for your attention</i> )	0.5	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1.6. The speaker <b>reinforces the central idea</b> (restates the main points) and makes a <b>relevant conclusion</b>	0.2	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1.7. <b>Interactive style</b> of presentation: the speaker asks rhetorical and direct questions to the audience to monitor their understanding of speech	0.3	
	1.8. The speaker <b>balances the amount of time</b> devoted to the main points	0.2	
<b>2. METHODS OF DELIVERY</b> highest points = <b>0,4</b>			
	2.1 The speaker performs <b>extemporaneous speaking style</b> with elements of reciting from memory	0,2	
	2.2 The speaker demonstrates <b>fluency</b> that involves avoiding too much repetition, self-correction or excessive hesitation	0.2	
	2.3 The speaker <b>reads from manuscript</b> or <b>recites from memory</b>	-0,1	
	2.4 The speaker presents <b>an impromptu speech</b>	0	
<b>3. STYLE OF DELIVERY</b> highest points = <b>0,1</b>			
	3.1. Adequate use of contact code: audience sensitive; Adequate use of proxemics:	0,1	
<b>B. LANGUAGE USE</b> highest points= <b>2.0</b>			
5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Language use</b> 1) <i>accuracy of language</i> : the speaker avoids pronunciation, grammar and lexical mistakes ; 2) the speaker uses a wide <i>range</i> of vocabulary and grammar structures.	1.0 1.0	
Total		<b>5</b>	

If the grading scale is from 0 (minimum score) to 5 (maximum score), the following Point-to-grade Conversion Table can be used:

4.75-5.0 points	A	3.25-3.74	D
4.25- 4.74-	B	3.0-3.24	E
3.75-4.24	C	2.5-2.99	FX
		2.0-2.49	F

In sum, the speakers' overall language proficiency is actualized in four communicative activities: reception, production, interaction, and mediation. In their turn, each of these activities have complex nature, manifest themselves in different discourse modes and possess specific revealing qualities. Spoken production as a communicative activity has a few central discourse modes relevant for occupational and educational domains of communication: sustained monologue, public announcements, addressing audience (making a presentation on a theme/topic). The assessment criteria for spoken production in addressing audience discourse mode can include two macro groups: Task fulfilment and Language use criteria. Task fulfillment criteria embrace organization of speech, methods of delivery and style of delivery criteria, while language use criteria can assess the speaker's accuracy and range of language usage.

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