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The Effective use of Rubrics in Speaking Assessment

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is the most difficult skill to assess objectively and reliably. It involves a combination of different variables that may have no or little correlation with each other, and all of them may need to be assessed separately to avoid or at least to reduce the subjectivity of the assessment. The aim of this study is to investigate the existing practices in design and use of speaking assessment rubrics. It also reveals and discusses the most common rubrics used in international worldwide excepted English language tests, as well as recommendations for the development of the speaking assessment rubrics.

KEYWORDS: speaking, assessment, grading, rubrics, criteria, CEFR scale.

Introduction. A rubric is a great tool for teachers because it is a simple way to set up a grading - criteria for assignments. Not only is this tool useful for teachers, it is helpful for students as well. A rubric defines in writing what is expected of the student to get a particular grade on an assignment [5]. Heidi Goodrich Andrade, a rubrics expert, defines a rubric as "a scoring tool that lists the criteria for a piece of work or 'what counts.' " For example, a rubric for an essay might tell students that their work will be judged on *purpose, organization, details, voice, and mechanics*. [2]

Literature review. Most of educators claim that a good rubric also describes levels of quality for each of the criteria. These levels of performance may be written as different ratings (e.g., Excellent, Good, Needs Improvement) or as numerical scores (e.g., 4, 3, 2, 1) Under mechanics, for example, the rubric might define the lowest level of performance as "7-10 misspellings, grammar, and punctuation errors," and the highest level as "all words are spelled correctly; your work shows that you understand subject-verb agreement, when to make words possessive, and how to use commas, semicolons and periods."

According to Walvoord, B. E:

- Rubrics help students and teachers define "quality."
- When students use rubrics regularly to judge their own work, they begin to accept more responsibility for the end product. It cuts down on the "am I done yet?" questions.
- Rubrics reduce the time teachers spend grading student work and make it easier for teachers to explain to students why they got the grade they did and what they can do to improve.

- Parents usually like the rubrics concept once they understand it, and they find rubrics useful when helping with homework. As one teacher says: "They know exactly what their child needs to do to be successful."

Knight thinks that student's inclusion is that best technique for effective understanding of rubrics during class. He shows some steps of it. Involve your students

- Understanding a Rubric: Arrange the students into groups of four or more and give them the rubric you will be using for a particular task. Tell the students to discuss the task you have given them and create quick samples of papers which would receive marks in each of the categories. The groups will then present their results to the whole class.
- Creating a Rubric: It is a good idea to involve your students in creating their own rubrics for classroom assignments. A student who can write the rubric for a math problem knows the whole process inside and out, and he/she can apply the knowledge and skills learned from the process to future assignments.
- Sometimes it's not possible to find an appropriate existing rubric to use or modify. To create your own rubric, follow these steps [3].

Methodology.

Since the LOTE Checkpoint C level does not have formal standardized assessments, it is important that the teacher create some form of evaluation so that students are informed about their progress. Teachers are encouraged to modify the enclosed rubrics or create their own, so that grades are not the only form of student assessment. Checkpoint C classroom teachers may prefer to distribute assessment rubrics at the beginning of a unit, so that students are aware of expectations and understand how their work will be evaluated. The following rubrics, guidelines, and checklist are used in conjunction with the New York State LOTE assessments:

- Informal Speaking Rubric
- Guidelines for Speaking
- Checkpoint C Writing Rubric
- Word Count Guidelines
- Writing Checklist.

The speaking rubric in this document is intended to help teachers of EAL learners in

Grades 1-4 to determine the speaking skills and abilities along the CFR scale. Note that the skill areas of listening, reading and writing are equally important and should be included in a comprehensive student plan for EAL assessment. The Grade 1-4 speaking rubric is organized under the following headings: Vocabulary Knowledge, Discourse, Grammar & Syntax, Strategic Knowledge, Fluency, Pronunciation and Pragmatic Knowledge. The rubrics are a work in progress; users are encouraged to revise or edit the rubrics for clarity. As teachers assign CFR speaking levels, they are encouraged to consider a student's spoken production and interaction in a variety of tasks/situations, as well as their knowledge of student performance in various classes. Assessment rubrics should accomplish three goals:

- inform the students of standards and expectations

- inform the students about levels of achievement
- Inform the students about specific areas in need of improvement.

The rubrics included in this document will help teachers to establish criteria for assessment that will enable students to reflect and to see where and how to improve their spoken skills in English; o Provide a basis for conversations among teachers, parents, and students about assessment processes and the relationship to progress along the CFR scale; o Facilitate communication with parents regarding their child's progress with English language learning; o Promote fair and consistent assessment of learner progress across subject areas through the additional lens of language learning; o Clarify expectations and as reference points when assessing speaking; o Design explicit instruction about speaking skills based on the skill descriptors provided in the CFR scale; o Assist classroom teachers with understanding the abilities of EAL students so that they may differentiate [6]. As teachers assign benchmark levels, they are encouraged to consider a student's spoken production and interaction in a variety of tasks/situations, as well as their knowledge of student performance in various classes throughout the school year [1].

RUBRIC EXPLANATION TASK COMPLETION

This measures how thoroughly the student completed the task (detail, length, “big picture”). A response that is very short negatively impacts other category scores (style/complexity, vocabulary, grammar/spelling, fluency, pronunciation) due to insufficient evidence.

STYLE & COMPLEXITY This measures the degree of sophistication and style used to communicate ideas — not what was said, but how it was said. Cohesive devices are words and phrases that link ideas and move forward the action in some form of logical narrative order, whether the ‘narrative’ is a story, a description, or a set of instructions. Adverbs and conjunctions serve most frequently as cohesive devices (words and phrases such as and, but, because, suddenly, in the first place, however).

VOCABULARY This measures accuracy, variety and quantity of vocabulary in the student response. When students choose simplified vocabulary in an attempt to avoid errors, the result is often accurate but inadequate use of vocabulary. Students should learn to use basic circumlocution. For instance, if a student does not know the word for an “autorepair shop”, the student could use words such as “where they fix cars, a place for broken cars, a car hospital or a car doctor.” In a formative assessment, recently learned vocabulary should be evident in the response where appropriate. In a summative assessment (usually end-of-unit, or end-of-year), the student should incorporate vocabulary from prior units or courses.

PRONUNCIATION & INTONATION This measures student ability to produce vowel and consonant sounds specific to the Mandarin language. The primary goal is to communicate effectively. The secondary goal is to produce more natural-sounding speech.

FLUENCY This measures the ease with which the speaker delivers the message. Ease and comfort with the language increase with practice.

Conclusion. Objective assessment is necessary, as students need to feel they are fairly assessed, on the other hand, subjective assessment permits to assess students' analytical skills, creativity, etc. Whenever we deal with subjective assessment, the use of rubrics is one of the most important parts of the assessment procedure in the educational sector for assessing students in a formative and a summative way. The use of rubrics is highly recommended by scholars for more than just one aspect. For example, they are good for detailed feedback to students after and during an assessment. Another meaningful use of rubrics is the guidance of

students and their improvement in learning, which is very important for the quality of an educational institution at the end. The development and the use of rubrics are challenging, but the rewards that educators, students, and parents receive deserve the effort.

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