

How Language Assessment Works
Gordon Allan, British Council Japan

How Language Assessment Works



Find someone who ...



What is Language Assessment Literacy?



What is LAL?

- When we talk about assessment literacy, it means literacy in the same sense as 'IT literacy', 'visual literacy' etc.
- So, with that in mind, what does language assessment literacy mean to you?

What is Language Assessment Literacy (LAL)? (1/2)

- The knowledge, skills and abilities required to design, develop, maintain or evaluate, large-scale standardised and/or classroom based tests.
- Familiarity with test processes.
- Awareness of principles and concepts that guide and underpin practice, including ethics and codes of practice.

(Adapted from Fulcher, 2012)

What is Language Assessment Literacy (LAL)? (2/2)

- The ability to place knowledge, skills, processes, principles and concepts within wider historical, social, political and philosophical frameworks in order to understand why practices have arisen as they have, and to evaluate the role and impact of testing on society, institutions and individuals.

(Adapted from Fulcher, 2012)

Who needs LAL?

Practitioners

- Teachers
- Academics engaged in language testing research
- Test designers
- School principals

Non-practitioners

- Test-takers / Learners
- Policy makers
- Employers
- The greater public

(Adapted from Pill & Harding, 2013)

Of course, different groups have different LAL needs.

- What do you think your LAL needs are?

A note about this workshop

- This workshop was originally developed to address the needs of teachers who want to know more about different aspects of assessment.

Language Assessment Literacy Project



Language Assessment Literacy Project

- The British Council's Language Assessment Literacy project “provides information and training for anyone who is interested in issues of language assessment.”
- As part of this project, a selection of animated videos with accompanying transcripts and worksheets have been produced. All these materials are available online here:

www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/assessment-literacy

Watch an Animation



British Council and Assessment

How much do you know about the British Council's work in assessment around the world? This video explains what we do in English Language Assessment and to promote many other UK examinations.



Assessing Writing

How do you devise a relevant writing test? This video looks at all the factors you have to consider when assessing writing.



Validity

What makes a test valid? This video explains what we mean when we speak about validity in assessment and also gives you an overview of the development of test validity over the years.



Assessing General Language Proficiency

Have you ever wondered what the term "General Language Proficiency" means? In this video we explore three ways in which we can describe this term.



Test Development

Have you ever wondered how a test is developed? In this video, we explain the development cycle - from planning, designing through to operational work and test monitoring.



Assessing Young Learners

How do you assess the language skills of Young Learners? In this video we explain how best to test Young Learners in different age groups.



Assessing Listening

What is the difference between Hearing and Listening? In this video, we explain the difference, and how listening is assessed in a language test.



Assessing English for Specific Purposes

Discover why assessment of English for Specific Purposes isn't just the assessment of general language proficiency with specific terminology thrown in, but a different matter altogether.



Assessing Speaking

Speaking is a multi-dimensional activity. In this video, we explore the different ways in which we can assess speaking a language test.



Technology and Language Assessment

What's the role of modern technology in language assessment? Find out more about three important uses of modern technology in language assessment: Test security, Computer-based tests and Scoring computer-based tests.



Assessing Reading

How do you design a relevant and meaningful reading test? We explore the different ways in which reading tests can be delivered and how to achieve a good mixture of text and tasks.



CEFR and Language Assessment

What do you know about the CEFR? In this video we look at the CEFR levels and show how they play an important role in all aspects of language assessment.

Language Assessment Literacy Project

- A glossary of assessment terms for teachers is currently in production and will be available soon.
- An assessment MOOC for teachers, 'Language Assessment in the Classroom', will be launched on FutureLearn on 16 April 2018:
- www.futurelearn.com/courses/language-assessment

Language Assessment in the Classroom

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ONLINE COURSE

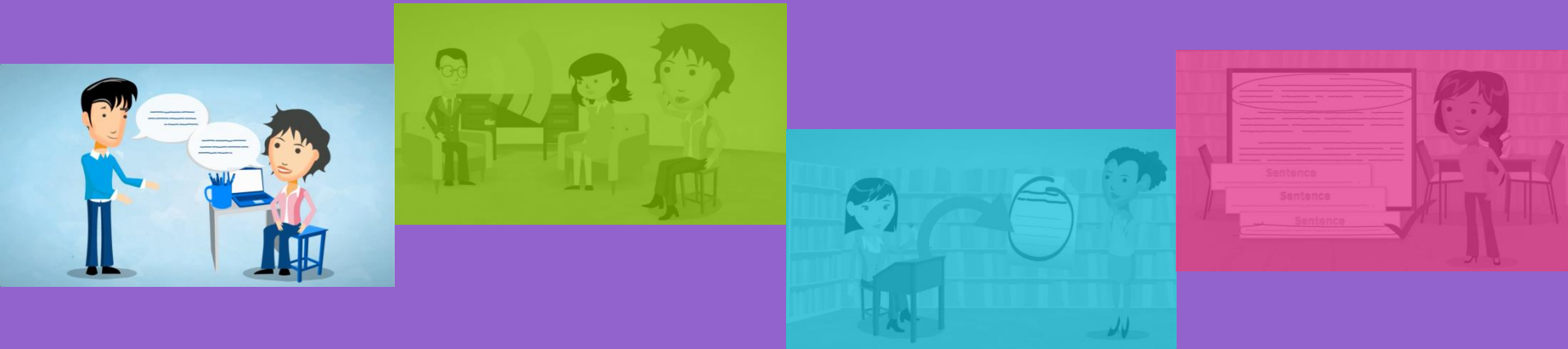
Language Assessment in the Classroom

Assessment is becoming increasingly important in language education. Understand it better with this course for language teachers.

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Assessing Speaking

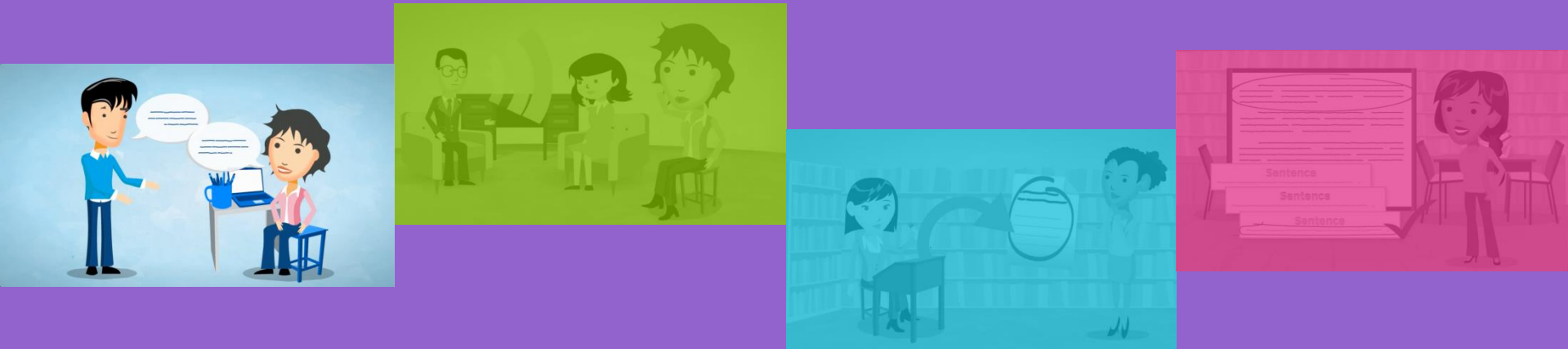


Assessing Speaking

1. What does speaking involve?
2. How can we assess speaking?
3. Assessing speaking in your context
4. Q & A

Assessing Speaking

1. What does speaking involve?



What is involved in speaking?

1. Why do we speak with others? What kind of things are we trying to achieve?
2. What is involved in the skill of speaking?
3. What do you think the issues might be in assessing speaking?

Why do we speak with others?

1. Why do we speak with others? What kind of things are we trying to achieve?

Interactional communication

- Social purposes (exchange of news or catching up).
 - *just being friendly.*

Transactional communication

- Conversation has an aim, for example:
 - *buying something*
 - *asking about specific information.*

Presentations and **monologues**

- Functional purposes, for example:
 - *to persuade*
 - *to complain.*

What is involved in the speaking skill?

2. What is involved in the speaking skill?

For example:

- **Communicating** a message
- **Organising** a message for the listener
- Using a **range of language** for different purposes
- Being **accurate** so there are no misunderstandings
- Being **fluent** so the listener is not 'waiting'
- Being **intelligible**
- Contributing to **keeping the conversation going**

Issues in assessing speaking

3. What do you think the issues might be in assessing speaking?

For example:

- Being **objective**
- Giving **reliable** assessment across different test takers
- **Timing**
- Making a task **clear** and **unambiguous**

Assessing Speaking

2. How can we test speaking?



How can we test speaking?

2.1 What is speaking?

2.2 How can we test speaking?

2.3 Scoring and grading

2.4 The future

2.5 Trade-offs in creating a speaking test

2.1 What is speaking?



2.1 What is speaking?

Watch part one.

- Which of the ideas you discussed are mentioned in the video?

Part 1: What is speaking?

To watch the video, please refer to:

<http://soy.britishcouncil.cn/wp/zh/aptis/speaking/>

2.1 What is speaking?

When thinking about speaking, we need to consider:

- Audience
- Reason
- Conditions

To create an affective assessment, we must attempt to replicate:

- Brain activity
- Social conditions

What is speaking?

Task

- Look at the examples in the table (page 5)
- Label the categories.

Extension task

- Try adding one more example to each category.

What is speaking?

Audience

- Students in a seminar group
- A foreign tourist
- A bank teller in a foreign country
-

What is speaking?

Reason

- To discuss an academic paper you've read
- To give directions
- To open a bank account
-

What is speaking?

Brain activity

- Finding words
- Putting them together in a meaningful way
- Sequencing ideas logically to help the listener understand
-

What is speaking?

Social conditions

- Informal conversation with friends (interactional)
- Academic discussion with classmates
- Sales pitch to potential customers
- Job interview
-

2.2 How can we test speaking?



2.2 How can we test speaking?

Watch part two.

What do you find out about these three aspects of speaking tests?

- **Formats** - types of interaction, number of test-takers, etc.
- **Tasks** - what test-takers have to do
- **Settings** - where and how the test takes place

Part 2: How can we test speaking?

To watch the video, please refer to:

<http://soy.britishcouncil.cn/wp/zh/aptis/speaking/>

Common Test Formats

What are the different exam formats we can use to assess speaking?

Formats	Test-takers	Notes
Interview	1	One or more examiners
Oral presentation	1	Real or imagined audience
Interactive task	2+	e.g. solve problems / make decisions
Group discussion	4-6	

Common Task Types 1/4

What are some of the different tasks we can use to assess speaking?

Task	Example(s)
Describing something	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Picture</i>• <i>Place</i>• <i>Person</i>• <i>Action</i>

Common Task Types 2/4

What are some of the different tasks we can use to assess speaking?

Task	Example(s)
Telling a story	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Based on a single picture</i>• <i>Based on a series of pictures</i>• <i>Invented</i>

Common Task Types 3/4

What are some of the different tasks we can use to assess speaking?

Task	Example(s)
Comparing things	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Real objects,</i>• <i>Photographs or artwork</i>• <i>Abstract concepts</i>

Common Task Types 4/4

What are some of the different tasks we can use to assess speaking?

Task	Example(s)
Giving some personal information	<i>Talking about:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>your family</i>• <i>your hobby</i>• <i>your hometown</i>• <i>some experience you've had (such as a holiday)</i>

Possible test settings

Performed live

- face-to-face
- over the phone
- via internet (e.g. computer or tablet)

Recorded and marked later

- voice recorder
- video
- computer or tablet

Discussion

Look at speaking tasks A-E (pages 7-8).

- Match them to the task types mentioned in the video.
- For each task, what kind of things would test-takers need to say? Try to think of specific examples.

Task A

Describe these two pictures and say what the differences are.



Comparing things

Task B

Tell me what you see in this photograph.



Describing something

Task C

Tell me about a time when you visited a museum.

Do you think people should pay to visit museums, or should they be free?

Giving some personal information

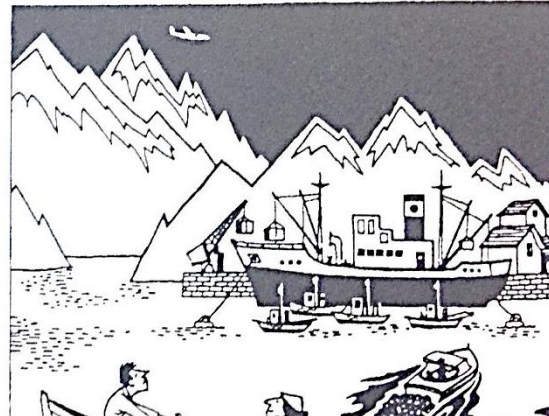
Task D

I will give each of you a picture. Don't show your pictures to each other.

A



B



Comparing things (pair task)

Please describe your pictures to each other and then talk about what is similar and what is different.

Student A, you begin.

(Adapted from Luoma, 2004. p.140)

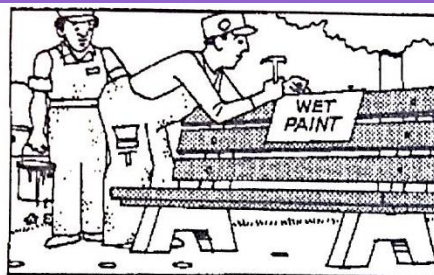
Task E

I'd like you to tell me the story that the pictures show, starting from number 1 and going through to number 6.

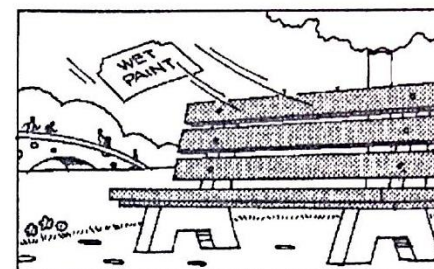
Please take one minute to look at the pictures and think about the story.

(Adapted from Luoma, 2004, p.141)

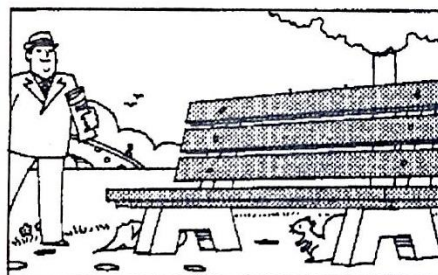
Telling a story



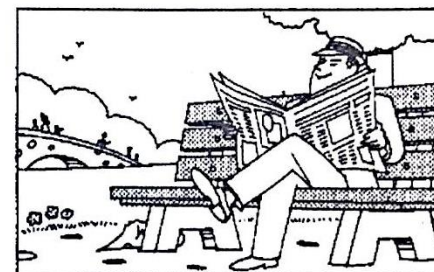
1



2



3



4



5



6

2.3 Scoring and Grading



Scoring and Grading

In all test situations, the examiners award a score or grade based on what they've observed.

- To do this, they usually use a **rating scale**.
- Watch the animation to find out more about rating scales.

Part 3: Scoring and grading

To watch the video, please refer to:

<http://soy.britishcouncil.cn/wp/zh/aptis/speaking/>

Rating scales

Your trainer will give you examples of rating scales from **Cambridge FCE** and **IELTS**. Which is simple and which is more detailed?

- Simple FCE
- More detailed IELTS

Rating scales

As you might expect, more detailed rating scales are usually better.

- The detail specified helps to achieve consistent ratings.

Q: According to the video, what are the possible advantages of simple rating scales?

A: *simple in design and simple to use*

Rating scales: Discussion

Look at the rating scales your trainer has given you.

- Which scale might a teacher choose to use for a classroom test? Why?

Good rating scales are task-specific

- Different tasks elicit different functions, so the samples of language that they elicit from learners will also differ.
- Good rating scales are developed with the task in mind, and take into account the kind of language that the learner has the opportunity to produce.

2.4 The future



2.4 The future

Watch the video.

- How do you feel about the role of computers in scoring speaking tests?

Part 4: The future

To watch the video, please refer to:

<http://soy.britishcouncil.cn/wp/zh/aptis/speaking/>

2.5 Trade-offs in creating a speaking test



Trade-offs in creating a test

For practical reasons, creating a test of speaking often involves making compromises, or trade-offs.

- What example of a trade-off is mentioned in the video?

Part 4: Trade-offs

To watch the video, please refer to:

<http://soy.britishcouncil.cn/wp/zh/aptis/speaking/>

Trade-offs in creating a test

What example of a trade-off is mentioned in the video?

- Want to test face-to-face interaction
- Not enough examiners available
- Compromise: test-taker interacts with an on-screen avatar

Assessing Speaking

3. Assessing speaking in your context



3 Assessing speaking in your context

Use the framework on pages 9 & 10 to make notes about a group whose speaking you would like to assess.



How Language Assessment Works
Assessing Speaking

3. Assessing speaking in your context

Think about a group whose speaking you would like to assess.

Learners		Examiner(s)
How many?	Age(s):	Who?
Occupation(s):	English level:	In person or remote?

3.1 Practical considerations

What resources do you have available for the test?

Resource	How many? / How much?
Time	
• Time for the test	
• Time for rating after the test	
Teachers / Staff	
• During the test	
• After the test (for rating)	
Technology	
• Computers	
• Tablets	
• Voice recorders	
• Headsets (headphone + microphone)	



How Language Assessment Works
Assessing Speaking

3.2 Formats, tasks and settings

What kind(s) of speaking does this group need to do?

	Example	1	2
Reason	to give directions		
Audience	foreign tourist(s)		

So, how could you assess their speaking?

	Example	1	2
Group, pair or individual?	Individual		
Task	Give directions from one place to another, based on a map of a town.		
Live or recorded?	Live		
Technology	Not needed		
Rating scale	Simple		

When you have finished, think about what criteria might be important to assess the type(s) of speaking you have chosen.

Assessing Speaking

4. Any questions?



References

- Aptis General Technical Manual
- **Luoma, S. (2004).** *Assessing speaking*. Cambridge University Press.

Before you go



Let's keep in touch

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