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Assessing Speaking

In this lesson, assessing speaking is being discussed. According to Brown (2004), there are five basic types of speaking. Just like in listening, intensive, responsive, and extensive are present with the addition of imitative and interactive speaking. Imitative speaking is simply the ability to parrot back a word or phrase. In this type, it doesn't matter if the student comprehends what they are imitating. The only goal is to reproduce what is said to them with the same pronunciation. Intensive speaking is the production of short stretches of oral language. An example would be to read aloud a passage or directed response tasks. Competency in this level is shown through achieving certain grammatical or lexical mastery. Responsive speaking includes tasks with interaction and test comprehension but at the limited level of short conversations. Meanwhile, interactive speaking also includes tasks with interaction but is more in length and complexity. For example, it includes multiple exchanges and multiple participants. Lastly, extensive speaking includes speech, oral presentation, and story-telling tasks. Oral interaction from listeners is either highly limited or ruled out together. The challenges of designing speaking tests are the interaction of speaking and listening, scoring procedures, and the design of elicitation techniques because most speaking is a product of the creative construction of sentences. The speaker has to make some choices as to what words, what meaning, what lexicon, what structure, and what discourse should be used.

In my first year of this degree program, one of the courses contains content that focuses on the production and classification of the (American) English speech sounds. It needs the student to be proficient in that area thus it is expected that we will have speaking tasks. One of the common tasks back then was imitative tasks where we should accurately reproduce a phoneme (and a word) that the teacher said. The teacher assessed us on the phonetic level of our oral production. Other speaking tasks I've experienced that are common in high school are oral presentations, persuasive speeches, and retelling a story, mostly those extensive speaking tasks. In persuasive speeches, in my high school, how we deliver them (pauses, stress patterns, rhythmic structure) has the most importance in the criteria than the speech's content.

I knew that these language skills are really difficult to assess in isolation because there will always be a crossover between two or more skills. For example, imitative speaking requires listening, though it's just for the prompt, the student still has to do some listening to be able to produce the proper

pronunciation. Their ability to listen could be a factor in their speaking competence. The student's reading skills should also be considered. The lesson reiterated that there is no speaking task capable of isolating a single skill of oral production and that scoring procedures are an issue in assessing speaking skills. I haven't had any demo teaching that focuses on teaching and assessing speaking (most of them are reading-focused), thus this is a knowledge that is new to me. Actually, how to properly assess these language skills is all new knowledge to me.

When one plans to teach the English language, it is inevitable that one will have to teach and assess these language skills. It is more important to know how to properly assess one than not knowing. I have always stated in my past CERA activities that I am still not sure if I actually want to walk on the teaching career path as I see teaching as a very huge responsibility. With that said, it is irresponsible for me not to apply this knowledge when an opportunity arises. Even if such opportunities won't come, I at least have the knowledge now to criticize future tests I might take.