Key of Language Assessment: Rubrics and Rubric Design

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of "rubric" in language testing and assessment and to highlight the parts of a rubric through various dimensions. It sets forth objectives, types of the rubric use. As the paper will illustrate, language testing and assessment in SLA demands many facets to take the learners to "successful learner point". Being aware of the effective use of rubrics reflect robustness of this critical assessment process.

Keywords: Rubric, assessment, dimensions of a rubric, measurement

The word "rubric" comes from the Latin word for "red." It was once used to signify the highlights of a legal decision as well as the directions for conducting religious services, found in the margins of liturgical books—both written in red.

In a broad sense, rubric refers to a term which has existed in English for more than 600 years and during that time, mostly it has meant a set of "printed rules or instructions" (Encarta Encyclopedia, 2004). However, in educational sense, it refers to different categories such as criteria foe assessment, evaluation of learning, gradients of learning of a set of instructions etc. (Brown, 2012).

Construction of a Rubric

A good activity never guarantees the accurate determination of a student's competency at a given task. At this point, rubrics stand for this main requirement. Since it specifies the skill being examined and what constitutes various levels of performance success. In order to construct a good rubric focus on "what to measure exactly, how to measure performance and decision on what a passing level of performance competency is" plays the key role. Even though based on the general guidelines a general rubric design may be organized and be used multiple times. Here is the process in detail:

1. Defining the Behavior to Be Assessed

Expected student outcomes, what they should accomplish at the end of each unit and end of each term should be clarified. For this, some questions should be asked:

- What concept, skill or knowledge am I trying to assess?
- What should my students know?
- At what level should my students be performing?
- What type of knowledge is being assessed: reasoning, memory or process.(Stiggins, 1994)

2. Choosing the Activity

After the determination of the purpose of the assessment, you should decide an activity and consider issues regarding time constraints, resources, and how much data is required. (Airasian, 1991; Popham, 1995; Stiggins, 1994)

3. Defining the Criteria

Third step after the decision of activity and tasks to be used, definition of which elements of the project/task will be used to find the success of the students' performance.

Airasian (1991) defines some steps to complete that process:

a. "Identify the overall performance or task to be assessed , and perform it yourself or imagine yourself performing it;
b. List the important aspects of the performance or product;
c. Try to limit the number of performance criteria, so they can all be observed during a student's performance;
d. If possible, have groups of teachers think through the important behaviors included in task;
e. Express the performance criteria in terms of observable student behaviors or product characteristics;
f. Don't use ambiguous words that cloud the meaning of the performance criteria;
g. Arrange the performance criteria in the order in which they are likely to be observed."

Parts of a Rubric

In this paper, it is aimed to provide an understanding "a rubric in language teaching". It consists typically two sections:

a. Scores along with one axis of the grid and language behavior descriptors inside the grid for what each score means in terms of language performance.
b. Language categories along one axis and scores along the other axis and language behavior descriptors inside the grid for what each score within each category means in terms of language performance (Brown, 2012)

However, there different categorization to refer to parts of a typical rubric. According to a Stevens and Levi, it should have four parts (2005)*(See Table 5)*:

Table 1: Parts of a Rubric

	Scale level 1	Scale level 2	Scale level 3
Dimension 1			
Dimension 2			
Dimension 3			
Dimension 4			

1. **Task description:** It is framed always by the instructor and includes a "performance" of some types by the student. That task can be a specific assignment, a paper, a presentation, a poster etc and it applies to overall behavior of the student such as participation, behavioral expectations in the classroom. Task descriptions are mostly cut and pasted from the syllabus and placed at the top of the grading rubric.
2. **Scale:** That part gives the description of how well or poor given task is performed and indicates the rubric`s evaluative goal. Terms applied to describe the level of performance should be tactful but clear, For example: "Mastery, partial mastery, progressing and emerging". Those words provide a positive, active, verb description of the next expectations from the student and mitigate the potential shock of low marks in the lowest levels of scale. Some commonly used labels are: "Sophisticated, competent, partly competent, not yet competent (NFS Synthesis Engineering Education Coalition, 1977); Accomplished, average, developing, beginning (College of Education, 1997); Distinguished, proficient, intermediate, novice (Gotcher, 1997); Advanced, intermediate high, intermediate, novice (American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages, 1986, 278).

There is no set of formulas for the number of levels in rubric scale however, mostly teachers tend to use scale with 3 levels of performance in their first rubric constructions.

3. Dimensions: That part lays out the components of the task. It also clarifies how the students` task can be broken down into components in terms of importance: Grammar, content of the assignment, which aspect of the assignment?

Dimensions should represent the types of the component skill to be achieved by the students in a scholarly work such as technique, citation, example analysis, use of language appropriate to the occasion.(See Table 2).

Example:

Task: Each student will make a 5-minute presentation on the changes in one community over the past 30 years. The student may focus the presentation in any way he or she wishes, but there needs to be a thesis of some sort, not just a chronological exposition. The presentation should include appropriate photographs, maps, graphs, and other visual aids for the audience.

Table 2: Dimensions of a Rubric

	Excellent	Competent	Need Work
Knowledge/understanding 20%			
Thinking/inquiry 30%			
Communication 20%			
Use of visual aids 20%			
Presentation skills 10%			

4. **Descriptions of dimensions:** Descriptions of dimensions help show where the student failed to the desired level of proficiency or highest expectation of the given task to be reached. If the dimension includes just one description, it is called "scoring guide rubrics". They allow greater flexibility and more personalization while expanding the time needed. Mostly, three dimension descriptions are preferred. The more descriptions, the harder it becomes to grade. If a dimension exceeds 5 descriptions, the ability to grade becomes more difficult.

5. **Example:**

Task: Each student will make a 5-minute presentation on the changes in one community over the past 30 years. The student may focus the presentation in any way he or she wishes, but there needs to be a thesis of some sort, not just a chronological exposition. The presentation should include appropriate photographs, maps, graphs, and other visual aids for the audience.(See Table 3: Descriptions of dimensions)
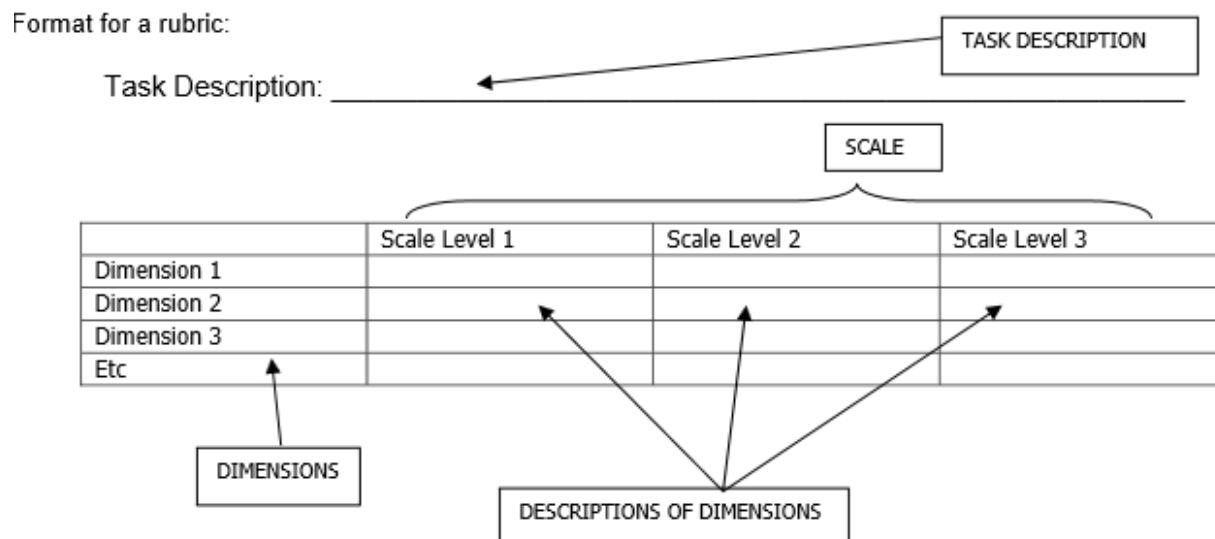
Table-3: Descriptions of Dimensions

	Criteria	Comments	Points
Knowledge/understanding 20%	The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail. Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.		
Thinking/inquiry 30%	The presentation is centered around a thesis, which shows a highly developed awareness of historiographic or social issues and a high level of conceptual ability.		
Communication 20%	The presentation is imaginative and effective in conveying ideas to the audience. The presenter responds effectively to audience reactions and questions.		
Use of visual aids 20%	The presentation includes appropriate and easily understood visual aids, which the presenter refers to and explains at appropriate moments in the presentation.		
Presentation skills 10%	The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard, using eye contact, a lively tone, gestures, and body language to engage the audience.		

Example: Three-level Rubric (See Table 4: Three-level Rubric Sample)

Task: Each student will make a 5-minute presentation on the changes in one community over the past 30 years. The student may focus the presentation in any way he or she wishes, but there needs to be a thesis of some sort, not just a chronological exposition. The presentation should include appropriate photographs, maps, graphs, and other visual aids for the audience.

Table 4: Three-level Rubric Sample

	Excellent	Competent	Needs Work
Knowledge / understanding 20%	The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail. Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.	The presentation uses knowledge that is generally accurate with only minor inaccuracies and that is generally relevant to the student's thesis. Research is adequate but does not go much beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned text.	The presentation uses little relevant or accurate information, not even that which was presented in class or in the assigned texts. Little or no research is apparent.
Thinking/inquiry 30%	The presentation is centered around a thesis, which shows a highly developed awareness of historiographic or social issues and a high evel of conceptual ability.	The presentation shows an analytical structure and a central thesis, but the analysis is not always fully developed or linked to the thesis.	The presentation shows no analytical structure and no central thesis.
Communication 20%	The presentation is imaginative and effective in conveying ideas to the audience. The presenter responds effectively to audience reactions and questions.	Presentation techniques used are effective in conveying main ideas, but they are a bit unimaginative. Some questions from the audience remain unanswered.	The presentation fails to capture the interest of the audience and/or is confusing in what is to be communicated.
Use of visual aids 20%	The presentation includes appropriate and easily understood visual aids, which the presenter refers to and explains at appropriate moments in the presentation.	The presentation includes appropriate visual aids, but these are too few, are in a format that makes the difficult to use or understand, or the presenter does not refer to or explain them in the presentation.	The presentation includes no visual aids or includes visual aids that are inappropriate or too small or messy to be understood. The presenter makes no mention of them in the presentation
Presentation skills 10	The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard, using eye contact, a lively tone, gestures, and body language to engage the audience.	The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard but tends to drone or fails to use eye contact, gestures, and body language consistently or effectively at times.	The presenter cannot be heard or speaks so unclearly that she or he cannot be understood. There is no attempt to engage the audience through eye contact, gestures, or body language.

Table 5: Format of a Rubric

Format for a rubric:

Task Description: _____ [TASK DESCRIPTION]

	Scale Level 1	Scale Level 2	Scale Level 3
Dimension 1			
Dimension 2			
Dimension 3			
Etc			

DIMENSIONS

SCALE

DESCRIPTIONS OF DIMENSIONS

Why do we Need Rubrics?

CARLA (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition) compiled different sets of functions for the use of rubrics (2013). According to CARLA, rubrics help us to set anchor points along a quality continuum, therefore, instructors can set reasonable and appropriate expectations for learners and judge consistently how well they are met or not.

1. Well-designed rubrics play a significant role to increase an assessment construct and content validity by aligning evaluation criteria to standards, curriculum, instruction and assessment tasks.
2. By setting criteria to rate, well-designed rubrics can increase the reliability of that assessment, thus, it applies consistency and objectivity.
3. Bias can be reduced by evaluating student's work with established criteria that help instructors clarify goals and improve their teaching by identifying the most salient criteria for the evaluation of performance and by writing the descriptions of excellent performance.
4. They help learners set goals and take the responsibility of their own learning, since it provides an understanding of optimal performance.
5. Learners can develop their ability to judge quality in their own work and others` work through self and peer assessment rubrics.
6. Rubrics answer the question "Why did I/my child get a B on this project?"
7. Rubrics help learners get specific feedback about their strong and weak areas and about how to develop their performance.
8. They play role in the assessment of learners` effort and performance on their own and make adjustments before the submission of the assignments for grading.
9. Rubrics allow the learners, teachers, parent to monitor the progress over a certain time period of instruction.
10. Time spent evaluating performance and providing feedback can be reduced.
11. They help learners autonomy for their own learning and assessment if they participate in rubric design, thus, they become self-directed learners.
12. Subjectivity in grading can be moved away by including students to assess work based on consistent, agreed upon and objective criteria. (Fiderer, 1999; Goodrich Andrade, 1997; SRI International-Center for Technology in Learning, 1997-2002; KasmanValenza, 2000; TeacherVision.com, 2000-2002;Tedick, 2002)

Types of Rubric

There are two dominant types of rubrics: holistic and analytic rubrics. However, primary trait and multiple trait rubrics are also commonly used. In comparison with each other, it is hard to tell which types or type is better to use since it depends on the task, key criteria to be fulfilled by the learners.

Before giving the decision which one to use in class, it is important to decide the key criteria. Blaz (2001) compile in her study most common tasks used in assessments. Her study is based on performance tasks: written and oral tasks. (See table:6)

Table-6

Some activities for oral performance assessments	Some activities for written performance assessments	
anecdote	advertisement	lyrics
ballad/rap/song	biography	magazine/news
book report	book report	article
campaign speech	booklet/brochure	metaphor
choral reading/speech	business letter	movie review
debate	cartoon	newsletter
demonstration	celebrity profile	new story ending
dialogue	checklist	notes
discussion	comic book	observation sheet
documentary	commercial script	outline
dramatization	comparison	pamphlet
explanation	creative writing	parody
fairy tale	critique	petition
free verse	description	play
interview	dialogue	poem
jingle/ad campaign	diary/journal	poster
joke	e-mail message	prediction
lecture	editorial essay	puppet show
lesson	fairy tale/myth	questionnaire
mock interview	glossary	quiz
monologue	guidebook	recipe
narration	handbook	report
newscast	handout	review
recipe	headline	riddle
riddle	interview script	script
role-play	job description	short story
seminar	joke	slogan
skit	journal	story problem
weather report	lesson plan	survey
	letter	telegram
	list	travel log
	log	yearbook entry

a. Holistic Rubric:

Holistic rubrics contain different levels of performance that describes the quality, quantity, quantity/quality of a task. (See sample holistic rubric: Appendix 1 and 2)

Holistic rubric	
A score of 3 – Proficient	The student`s project has a hypothesis, a procedure, collected data, and analyzed results. The project is thorough and the findings are in agreement with the data collected. There are minor inaccurancies that don't affect the quality of the project.
A score of 2 – Adequate	The student`s project may have a hypothesis, a procedure, collected data and analyzed results. The project is not as thorough as it could be; there are a few overlooked areas. The project has a few inaccuracies that affect the quality of the project.
A score of 1 – Limited	The student`s project may have a hypothesis, a procedure, collected data and analyzed results. The project has several inaccuracies that affect the quality of the project.

In that type of evaluation, raters judge by forming an overall impression of learners` performance and matching it to best fitting column on the scale. Each scale describes performance according to several criteria such as range of vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, fluency etc. Mostly, 4 or 5 performance levels are available in holistic rubrics. Generally, teachers find it efficient and easy to use for classroom assessments.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Holistic Rubrics

Advantages

- They are often written generically and can be used with many tasks.
- They emphasize what learners can do, rather than what they cannot do.
- They save time by minimizing the number of decisions raters must make.
- Trained raters tend to apply them consistently, resulting in more reliable measurement.
- They are usually less detailed than analytic rubrics and may be more easily understood by younger learners.

Disadvantages

- They do not provide specific feedback to test takers about the strengths and weaknesses of their performance.
- Performances may meet criteria in two or more categories, making it difficult to select the one best description. (If this occurs frequently, the rubric may be poorly written.)
- Criteria cannot be differentially weighted.(Teddick, 2002; TeacherVision.com, 2000-2002)

b. Analytic Rubric

According to Taggart, analytic scales are the types which tend to focus on broad dimensions of writing or speaking performance. These dimensions may be similar with those found in a holistic scale, but they are presented in separate categories and rated individually. Points may be assigned for performance on each of the dimensions and a total score calculated. (See sample analytic rubrics: Appendix 3)

In general sense, analytic rubrics are associated with large-scale assessment of general dimensions of language performance. However, analytic rubrics certainly can be created or adapted for use in classroom settings and with particular tasks (1998).

In practice, the names "analytic rubric" and "multiple trait rubric" may be used interchangeably.

Advantages

According to Moskal, analytic rubrics have those advantages;

- They provide useful feedback to learners on areas of strength and weakness.
- Their dimensions can be weighted to reflect relative importance.
- They can show learners that they have made progress over time in some or all dimensions when the same rubric categories are used repeatedly (2000).

Disadvantages

- According to Teddick, For different aspects of students` writing or speaking performance, separate scores are considered more artificial, since learner can`t get a good assessment of the whole of performance (2002).
- They take more time to create and use.
- It is hard to reach inter and intra reliability on all the dimensions in comparison to a single scored holistic rubric.
- Raters tend to evaluate grammar related categories more strictly than other categories. In other words, they overemphasize the role of accuracy. (**McNamara, T. (1996)**

Performance dimensions commonly found in analytic rubrics include:

Speaking & Writing

- Content
- Vocabulary
- Accuracy/Grammar/Language Use
- Task fulfillment
- Appropriate use of language
- Creativity
- Sentence structure/Text type
- Comprehensibility

Writing

- Organization
- Style
- Mechanics
- Coherence and Cohesion

Speaking

- Fluency
- Pronunciation
- Intonation

(CARLA, 2012)

c. Primary Trait Rubric

Primary Trait rubrics was developed by Llyod-Jones and Carl KLaus in 1977 (Lloyd-Jones, 1977). Applebee states that primary trait rubrics aim to evaluate the primary language function or rhetorical trait by a given task or prompt. Its initial formulations focused mostly on the specific approach a writer may take to be successful on a specific given task; every task required its own scoring guide (2000).An example developed by Teddick to evaluate "persuading an audience" is(See Table 4):

Table 4: Primary Trait – Persuading an Audience

Primary Trait : Persuading an audience	
0	Fails to persuade the audience
1	Attempts to persuade but doesn't provide sufficient support
2	Presents a somewhat persuasive argument but without consistent development and support
3	Develops a persuasive argument that is well developed and supported

d. Multiple Trait Rubrics

Hamp-Lyons developed that rubric type (1991). It is based on the concepts of primary trait scoring and used to provide diagnostic feedback to learners or teachers, stakeholders, parents etc about the performance whether it is according to context-appropriate and task-appropriate criteria in a text or topic.

Multiple trait rubrics are similar to analytic rubrics because of its several categories and in practice, there are terms used interchangeably. However, difference between two types is that analytic rubrics evaluate more traditional and generic dimensions of language production, while multiple trait rubrics focus on specific features of performance required to fulfill the given task or tasks. (See sample multi-trait rubric: Appendix 4)

Advantages

- The rubrics are aligned with the task and curriculum.
- Aligned and well-written primary and multiple trait rubrics can ensure construct and content validity of criterion-referenced assessments.
- Feedback is focused on one or more dimensions that are important in the current learning context.
- With a multiple trait rubric, learners receive information about their strengths and weaknesses.
- Primary and multiple trait rubrics are generally written in language that students understand.
- Teachers are able to rate performances quickly.

- Many rubrics of this type have been developed by teachers who are willing to share them online, at conferences, and in materials available for purchase.

Disadvantages

- Information provided by primary trait rubrics is limited and may not easily translate into grades.
- Task-specific rubrics cannot be applied to other tasks without adaptation of at least one or more dimensions. (CARLA, 2012)

Conclusion

It is very significant to know the procedure of assessment and use of efficient tools to do it. Rubrics play a key role in evaluation of proficiency of students especially by providing validity and reliability. Getting right feedback, learners feel more comfortable for the next step to be taken to improve; Therefore, assessors` role is not just giving feedback, but encouraging for further development by indicating the learners` weakness without discouraging in an objective way.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Advanced Holistic Rubric

Role Play

Exceeds Expectations	Student accurately and compellingly articulates the needs of his/her character and responds meaningfully to others' comments using well-connected sentences. Student uses a variety of sentence structures and grammatical forms that allow discourse to flow. Vocabulary is specific and appropriate, and there are minimal errors in grammar and word choice that do not impact comprehension.
Meets expectations-strong	Student accurately articulates the needs of his/her character and responds to others' comments with complex sentences. Student uses a variety of sentence structures and grammatical forms that allow discourse to flow most of the time. Vocabulary is mostly appropriate, and several minor errors in grammar and word choice may have a slight impact on comprehension.
Meets expectations-weak	Student articulates most of the needs of his/her character and responds to 1-2 comments with complete sentences. Student uses at least 3 different sentence structures and several grammatical forms that allow discourse to flow most of the time. Available vocabulary somewhat limits conversation; circumlocution or other strategies may be used. Errors in grammar and word choice lead to some errors in comprehension that are clarified in the target language.
Does not meet expectations	Student fails to articulate his/her character's needs and/or doesn't respond to other comments. Speech consists mostly of short sentences and uses limited sentence structures. Many errors in grammar and vocabulary lead to significant errors in comprehension.

http://www.carla.umn.edU/assessment/vac/evaluation/e 1 .html

Appendix 2 – Holistic Rubric

 Who am I? Intermediate

3	Student asks a variety of questions related to both physical features and other traits. Student answers partner's questions with complete sentences and accurate information. Questions and answers use a range of appropriate vocabulary and grammar features taught in class. Minor grammatical errors do not impact comprehension.
2	Student asks several questions related to physical features and other traits. Student answers partner's questions with mostly complete sentences and accurate information. Questions and answers use appropriate vocabulary and grammar features taught in class. Several grammatical errors may slightly impact comprehension, but misunderstandings are clarified in the target language.
1	Student asks minimal questions related to physical features or other traits. Student answers partner's questions with some accuracy. Vocabulary and grammar are simple. Significant grammatical errors lead to multiple misunderstandings.

Appendix 3 - Analytic Rubric

Who am I? (Intermediate)

Asking questions	
3	Student asks a variety of questions related to both physical features and other traits
2	Student asks several questions related to physical features and other traits
1	Student asks minimal questions related to physical features or other traits.
Providing information	
3	Student answers partner's questions with complete sentences and accurate information.
2	Questions and answers use appropriate vocabulary and grammar features taught in class.
1	Student answers partner's questions with some accuracy.
Vocabulary and Accuracy	
3	Questions and answers use a range of appropriate vocabulary and grammar features taught in class.
2	Questions and answers use appropriate vocabulary and grammar features taught in class.
1	Vocabulary and grammar are simple.
Accuracy	
3	Minor grammatical errors do not impact comprehension.
2	Several grammatical errors may slightly impact comprehension, but misunderstandings are clarified in the target language.
1	Significant grammatical errors lead to multiple misunderstandings.

http://www.carla.umn.edu/assessment/vac/evaluation/e_l.html

Appendix 4 – Multi-trait Rubric

Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions. The interpersonal mode of communication is characterized by "spontaneous" conversation. While role role plays are often unrehearsed, skits generally are not and would therefore not fit the description of the interpersonal mode. (Rubric based on ACTFL Performance Guidelines forK-12 LearnersOACTFL)

	Exceeds expectations	Meets expectations	Not there yet
Negotiating meaning and participation in conversation	Able to use sufficient quantity of language to communicate successfully with partner/group using formulaic responses and memorized language. Attempts to express own meaning.	Able to use sufficient quantity of language to communicate successfully with partner/group using formulaic responses and memorized language.	Attempts to communicate with partner/group are not successful because responses are not appropriate or adequate.
Vocabulary	Shows control of a broad range of the vocabulary taught in class and always uses this vocabulary appropriately.	Shows control of an adequate range of the vocabulary taught in class and most often uses this vocabulary appropriately.	Shows very limited control of the vocabulary taught, making discussion extremely difficult; OR not enough speech to evaluate
Accuracy: (Use of basic language structures)	Speech is accurate when using memorized phrases. Some errors may occur when expressing own meaning.	Speech is generally accurate when using memorized phrases. Errors are more frequent when trying to express own meaning.	Memorized phrases contain frequent errors and/or use of English.
Comprehensibility: (How well can students be understood)	Student's speech can be understood by those accustomed to speech of language learners.	Most of student's speech can understood by those accustomed to speech of language earners.	Student's speech can be understood only with effort and use of interpretation by those accustomed to speech of language learners.
Pronunciation and Fluency	Speech has few pauses. No mispronunciation that would interfere with comprehension by a sympathetic native speaker.	Speech contains some pauses and rephrasing. Mispronunciation of words or errors in intonation cause several misunderstandings.	Speech is hesitant, choppy. Mispronunciation and inaccurate stress make understanding difficult. Much repetition; OR not enough speech to evaluate

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