

# Communicative-Language Assessment Approach and the Effect of Technology in Designing Speaking Rubrics

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## Abstract

This paper delves into the complicated realm of communicative language evaluation, intricately examining the multifaceted impact of technology on the construction of speaking rubrics. At its core, the assessment technique for communicative language staunchly upholds the notion of language as a vibrant tool of communication. It emphasizes the imperative to assess language learners based on their ability to effectively engage in real-life linguistic interactions within the target language. In stark contrast to the mere regurgitation of grammatical rules and vocabulary, this method underscores the contextual employment of language skills. In turn, speaking rubrics are language-evaluation instruments that are used to measure learners' verbal skills. They are intended to test students' abilities to use language in context and communicate successfully in the target language.

**Keywords:** communicative assessment, communicative competence, technology, speaking rubrics

## 1. Introduction

The genesis of the communicative-language assessment technique can be traced to its precursor, the communicative-language teaching approach. It emerged in the 1970s as a revolutionary response to the limitations of traditional grammar-translation and audio-lingual methodologies (Brandl, 2020). The communicative-language teaching method revolutionized language instruction by placing paramount importance on meaningful engagement and authentic communication within the language classroom (Gebriel, 2021). At its core, this method propagated the notion that language learning should be firmly rooted in real-life contexts, with a resolute focus on the mastery of effective communication using language as the quintessential tool.

As an organic outgrowth of the communicative-language teaching framework, the communicative-language assessment approach came into being. This evaluative methodology stemmed from the firm belief that language learners ought to be appraised based on their ability to adeptly employ language in genuine real-world situations, rather than being strictly evaluated on their syntactical and lexical prowess (Gebriel, 2021). At its heart, communicative language assessment revolves around assessing learners' aptitude in employing language within contextual frameworks, skillfully gauging their proficiency in effectively conveying their thoughts and ideas in the target language.

## 2. Communicative Assessment

In recent years, the communicative-language assessment approach has garnered immense popularity owing to its intrinsic emphasis on practical language usage. In stark contrast to conventional language-assessment methods that prioritize the acquisition of grammar rules and vocabulary, communicative language assessment steadfastly recognizes that the ultimate objective of language learning is to facilitate seamless communication with others (Green, 2020). Hence, it places heightened significance on learners' ability to use language in authentic real-life situations. Moreover, communicative language assessment harmoniously aligns with the prevailing pedagogical trend of task-based language teaching, which foregrounds the application of language skills in practical, genuine contexts (Green, 2020). By skillfully evaluating students' proficiency in effectively communicating in the target language, communicative language assessment serves as a catalyst for fostering language abilities that seamlessly integrate into the fabric of real-world scenarios.

The evolution of the communicative-language assessment method is inexorably intertwined with that of the communicative-language teaching approach. The applicability of this assessment technique extends to diverse realms, including academic and professional domains, in which language competence is meticulously evaluated (Dimova et al., 2020). Over time, this methodology has expanded to encompass an array of evaluation methods, such as oral interviews, role-plays, and group discussions (Dimova et al., 2020). Undoubtedly, the communicative-language assessment technique has now permeated the landscape of language teaching and testing, perpetuating its pivotal role as a subject of serious scholarly inquiry within the realm of language education.

The genesis of the communicative-language evaluation technique can be attributed to the collaborative efforts of Michael Canale and Merrill Swai. Canale, a distinguished linguist specializing in second language learning and assessment, harbored a profound fascination with the notion of communicative competence (Effendi, 2020). Dissatisfied with traditional language assessments that primarily focused on grammar and vocabulary, Canale firmly believed that the evaluation of language learners should center on their ability to effectively employ language in real-life contexts (Effendi, 2020). To address this need, he spearheaded the development of the communicative-language assessment technique, placing paramount importance on the practical application of language within contextual frameworks.

Canale's expertise in language testing played a pivotal role in the conception of the communicative-language evaluation methodology. Thus Canale sought to devise a novel solution (Effendi, 2020). His brainchild was the communicative-language assessment technique, which has since emerged as one of the most widely employed approaches for assessing language competency.

This methodology has garnered universal recognition as an effective means of ascertaining language proficiency. Its versatility allows for adaptation to a diverse array of evaluation methodologies, finding applications in various contexts, including academic and professional settings (Lanteigne et al., 2021). By placing paramount importance on the practical application of language within context, learners are evaluated based on their ability to successfully communicate in the target language. As a result, it serves as a valuable tool for language educators and testers seeking to develop more robust and effective methods of assessing language competency.

### *2.1 Communicative Competence*

At the crux of the communicative-language assessment approach lies its distinctive emphasis on evaluating learners' ability to effectively employ language in real-life situations. It serves as a vehicle for assessing learners' communicative competence—their ability to proficiently use language to achieve communication goals across diverse contexts.

Central to the efficacy of communicative assessment in language instruction is its ability to provide learners with feedback directly aligned with their communicative objectives. With the communicative-language assessment technique, learners are evaluated based on their contextual language usage, and they receive valuable feedback on their capacity to successfully communicate in the target language (Maryam, 2020). This feedback plays a pivotal role in guiding learners to identify areas of improvement in their communicative competence and in equipping them with the necessary guidance to enhance their language skills.

An indispensable component of the communicative-language evaluation strategy is the creation of speaking rubrics, which serve as indispensable tools for assessing a learner's verbal proficiency. These rubrics are meticulously designed to evaluate the learner's ability to employ language within contextual frameworks and communicate effectively in the target language. Several factors come into play when crafting speaking rubrics, encompassing the communicative goals of the assessment, the specific task and setting in which the evaluation takes place, and the individual language competencies being assessed (National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine et al., 2020). As technology continues to pervade the realm of language learning and teaching, comprehending its potential for enhancing the design of speaking rubrics and of the communicative-language evaluation approach becomes imperative.

Effective communication lies at the heart of successful language education and evaluation. The communicative-language evaluation method places a premium on communication, emphasizing the ability to effectively use language in real-life contexts. Consequently, language teachers and testers must remain attentive and responsive to the needs and inquiries of their students (Rahman et al., 2019). Advancements in technology have facilitated seamless communication between language educators and learners. Email, chat applications, and video conferencing solutions offer convenient avenues for interaction, enabling language teachers and testers to address student queries, provide feedback, and offer support with ease.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that technology should not supplant face-to-face interaction. While digital communication tools can be efficient and valuable, they cannot replicate the inherent human connection fostered through in-person conversation. Thus, language instructors and testers must strive to strike a balance between digital and in-person interactions to best cater to the language learning needs of their students.

The communicative assessment methodology stands out as an innovative approach to evaluating language proficiency, prioritizing the successful communication of language learners in real-life scenarios. It acknowledges the significance of communicative competence when evaluating language proficiency, highlighting the assessment of learners' capacity to use language effectively in genuine situations. Through the evaluation of learners' ability to accomplish communication goals using language, communicative assessment becomes a valuable instrument for cultivating language skills that seamlessly integrate into real-world contexts (Ockey & Green, 2020). This approach emphasizes the practical application of language abilities and promotes a deeper understanding of language in authentic communicative settings.

## *2.2 Communicative Assessment in Language Teaching*

A notable hallmark of communicative assessment in language teaching is its ability to furnish learners with feedback that aligns directly with their communicative objectives. Within the framework of this technique, learners' performance is evaluated based on their contextual language usage, with valuable feedback provided on their efficacy in communicating effectively in the target language (Shabani-Jadidi, 2020). This feedback assumes a pivotal role in guiding learners to pinpoint areas for improvement in their communicative competence, while equipping them with the necessary guidance to enhance their language skills.

## *2.3 Testing Adaptation*

The communicative-language assessment methodology has garnered widespread recognition as a prominent approach for evaluating language skills. A distinguishing characteristic of this approach lies in its steadfast focus on assessing learners' capacity to effectively utilize language in real-life settings (Tsagari, 2020). Rather than solely emphasizing grammar and vocabulary knowledge, the communicative language evaluation technique centers on evaluating learners' ability to communicate successfully in the target language, placing considerable importance on communicative competence—the aptitude to employ language to accomplish communication goals across diverse contexts.

A pivotal aspect of communicative evaluation in language instruction resides in its ability to provide learners with feedback directly linked to their communicative goals. Within the communicative language assessment framework, learners' performance is evaluated based on their contextual language usage, while receiving feedback on their efficacy in communicating successfully in the target language.

## *2.4 Speaking Rubrics*

Speaking rubrics represent a critical component of the communicative-language evaluation strategy, serving as indispensable tools for assessing students' verbal proficiency. Various factors come into play during the construction of speaking rubrics, including the communicative goals of the assessment, the specific task and setting in which the evaluation occurs, and the individual language abilities being assessed. As technology continues to permeate language learning and teaching, it becomes imperative to comprehend how technology can be leveraged to enhance the design of speaking rubrics and augment the communicative-language evaluation method.

Creating speaking rubrics is a crucial step in the communicative language evaluation process, enabling the assessment of learners' verbal proficiency and their ability to use language in context. Several factors shape the development of speaking rubrics, including the communicative objectives of the assessment, the task and setting of the evaluation, and the specific language abilities being assessed. The initial phase involves establishing clear communication goals for the assessment, aligning them with the expected linguistic skills of the students. For example, if the assessment aims to measure learners' ability to negotiate meaning in a business environment, the rubric should reflect this objective (Vitta & Al-Hoorie, 2020). It should include criteria that assess learners' competence in negotiation and effective communication in a professional context, as well as their proficiency in using appropriate business language.

The next stage involves analyzing the evaluation task and context, tailoring the rubric to accurately represent the specific activity and setting. For instance, if learners are expected to deliver a presentation in a professional setting, the rubric should reflect that scenario (Vitta & Al-Hoorie, 2020). It should include criteria that assess learners' ability to use language appropriately in a professional environment and their skill in delivering a clear and successful presentation.

The final phase focuses on considering the specific language abilities to be evaluated. The rubric should be designed to assess the particular language skills expected from learners. If the evaluation focuses on grammar and vocabulary accuracy, the rubric should include criteria for evaluating learners' command of grammar and vocabulary (Winke & Brunfaut, 2020). Similarly, if the evaluation aims to assess fluency and smoothness in language use, the rubric should encompass criteria for evaluating learners' fluency and smoothness of expression. By following these stages in creating speaking rubrics, language instructors can effectively evaluate learners' verbal proficiency and ability to use language in context (Winke & Brunfaut, 2020). This approach facilitates comprehensive and targeted language assessment, enabling a more accurate understanding of learners' abilities.

### 3. Technological Influences on the Approach

Exploring the impact of technology on the communicative-language evaluation technique constitutes a vital area of inquiry within language education. The advent of social media and other digital communication platforms has expanded learners' opportunities to engage with language in authentic settings. Nevertheless, the use of technology presents challenges for both learners and educators, particularly in the realm of language evaluation. Concerns arise, for instance, regarding the adequacy of automated voice-recognition software in capturing learners' contextual language proficiency. Consequently, language instructors must carefully examine the role of technology in evaluation and devise strategies to integrate technology in ways that enhance the efficacy of the communicative-language evaluation approach.

The impact of technology on this approach is a crucial and complex area of research. With the increasing integration of technology in language learning and teaching, it is important to understand both its benefits and drawbacks (Dimova et al., 2020). Technology has the potential to significantly influence the creation of speaking rubrics in several ways. It can expand the range of rating criteria, such as assessing tone, pronunciation, and fluency. Additionally, technology can provide learners with prompt feedback, aiding them in improving their language skills. However, challenges such as consistent internet connectivity and the availability of proper equipment and software should be taken into consideration. Furthermore, concerns exist about the potential loss of essential human connection in language acquisition if technology is overly relied upon (Dimova et al., 2020). Hence, a balanced assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of employing technology in language instruction is essential, along with the development of effective strategies to maximize its benefits while mitigating potential issues.

Utilizing technology for creating speaking rubrics offers various advantages compared to traditional methods. For instance, technology enables the development of more comprehensive and precise rubrics that better align with the communication objectives of the assessment. Moreover, technology can provide a more objective and consistent evaluation of student performance, reducing bias and enhancing assessment reliability (Maryam, 2020). And technology can offer learners a more engaging and dynamic assessment experience, fostering motivation and encouraging them to further develop their language skills.

The use of technology in language evaluation presents certain challenges. For instance, some students, particularly those less familiar with digital technologies, may find the use of technology intimidating (Rahman et al., 2019). Thus, language educators must thoroughly examine the role of technology in language assessment and develop strategies to effectively incorporate it into the communicative-language assessment approach. Technology has the potential to significantly impact the design of speaking rubrics and overall evaluation strategy. While technology offers notable advantages compared to traditional methods, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the potential obstacles and limitations it may pose (Ockey & Green, 2020). By critically assessing the role of technology in language assessment and devising ways to leverage technology to enhance the communicative-language assessment methodology, language educators can contribute to improving the effectiveness and reliability of assessment practices.

The communicative-language assessment methodology is widely adopted for evaluating language skills, emphasizing the use of language in real-life contexts and assessing learners' successful communication in the target language. However, achieving direct authenticity in language testing through this approach poses certain challenges. The extent to which direct authenticity is achieved depends on various factors (Vitta & Al-Hoorie, 2020). Nevertheless, numerous instances demonstrate that the communicative technique can indeed attain authenticity in language testing. For instance, role-plays and simulations provide learners with opportunities to demonstrate their language usage in real-life situations (Gebriel, 2021). These activities can be designed to mirror specific contexts in which learners are likely to use the target language, enabling a more realistic evaluation of their proficiency.

The utilization of authentic materials is another avenue through which the communicative approach can foster authenticity in language testing. Incorporating genuine resources such as news articles, movies, and podcasts exposes learners to authentic language and cultural aspects within real-life contexts (Derwing et al., 2022). Incorporating authentic materials in language testing allows learners to demonstrate their ability to comprehend and use language in practical situations.

However, despite the potential for authenticity, the communicative approach also faces challenges and limitations. Designing activities and assessments that encompass the full range of real-life scenarios can be demanding. Additionally, the integration of technology in language testing, particularly in oral evaluation, can present difficulties. Nevertheless, the communicative approach remains a vital and widely used method for assessing language proficiency, expected to continue playing a significant role in language education in the future.

#### 4. Conclusion

In summary, the communicative-language assessment approach presents a fresh perspective that prioritizes the practical application of language skills and genuine communication. This methodology corresponds harmoniously with task-based language teaching and places emphasis on the practical use of language abilities in authentic settings. Speaking rubrics assume a crucial role within the communicative assessment framework, enabling the evaluation of oral proficiency and the assessment of language usage within specific contexts. While technology plays a significant role in communicative language assessment, educators must strike a balance between digital and face-to-face interactions to cater to the diverse needs of students. Overall, communicative language assessment serves as a valuable instrument for cultivating effective language evaluation techniques that integrate seamlessly into real-life scenarios, nurturing language proficiency that is practical and widely applicable.

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