

2. LOLA – HOW IT IS SEEN AND BROUGHT FORWARD

THE EMECOE-PROJECT OF LEARNING-ORIENTED-LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT

2.1. Definition

We consider that learners are individuals who should be supported by differentiating their education and their language learning and this partly with the help of learning oriented assessments.

After a period of test invasion overflowing also language teaching and leading sometimes to the strange phenomenon of “teaching to the test”, we insist on (re-) concentrating primarily on teaching and learning and on formative testing.

Following Liz Hamp-Lyons and Tony Green (University of Bedfordshire) and Dave Allan (NILE) we start with the following statements:

LOLA should have:

Learning-focused tasks

- Scaffolded task completion (breaking learning up into chunks and providing a concrete structure)
- Interactive/exploratory questioning
- Learner-involved assessment
- Possibility for self-assessment and/or peer evaluation
- Immediate and learning-focused feedback
- Interlocutor/assessor scaffolding
- Focus on feed-forward

Focusing on speaking skills LOLA should, at the end of the day, lead to a greater independence in the learning process.

The basis for the development of a [learning oriented assessment grid](#) are practice and feedback of teachers, learners, materials and classrooms activities.

2.2. Our background

The Austrian project team members have started in 2008 with the development of a so called “diagnostic assessment”.

The team-members and the cooperation partner from NILE (Norwich) immediately enlarged the objective of the assessment and provided concrete feedback on learners’ competences. The online product was called [AOC-check \(Awareness-Oriented-Coaching\)](#) a term which expresses the intention to offer not only a diagnostic tool but also marks the beginning of a learning process, thus corresponding to formative assessment. The *AOC online-check* provided valid results for the following criteria:

- A. LISTENING DISCRIMINATION
- B. LISTEN AND READ
- C. LISTEN AND WRITE
- D. GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT
- E. READING SIGNS, NOTICES AND VISUALS
- F. READING LONGER TEXTS

The AOC online-check also provides precise information for teachers about the aims of this kind of assessment and the way of delivering the results. It gives advice on how to start working on students’ strengths and weaknesses.

As online-assessments are reduced to limited formats, teachers asked the team also to develop assessment materials for writing and speaking.

The *AOC check* provides three parts:

1. the online-check

2. a writing assessment
3. a speaking assessment.

The following statements deal explicitly with the development of a speaking assessment check and a speaking assessment grid.

During different seminars the Spanish partners also developed speaking assessment grids, so that the EMECOE team could rely on profound knowledge and skills concerning diagnostic assessment grids which are CEFR-related and provide feedback on the student's language skills.

The question came up whether a new grid should be developed or whether existing grids based on the participants' experience in assessment during the last years could be combined.

In Austria and in Spain many recordings and videos have been checked and evaluated by the team members with the help of the existing grids. The outcome was that a practical and effective formative speaking assessment could not be reduced to a kind of diagnostic grid but should provide clear statements about communicative skills (not only language skills!) Thus, the grid has to include criteria for task fulfilment (for interactive dialogues as well as for sustained monologues).

Effective communicative competence means that the interlocutor as listener or communication partner judges not only language skills but in many cases also all kinds of social competences like eye contact, body language, self-confidence, initiative taking, reacting to interlocutor's ideas, asking for clarifications or for the interlocutor's opinion, active listening, taking up interlocutor's ideas and combining them with his/her contributions, risk-taking, ...

All these elements, and perhaps some more, contribute to a successful communication and ensure the achievement of the given task.

This leads us to the essential question about tasks as bases for grids assessing communicative competence.

2.3. Task based speaking activities

Definition :

We suggest that **formative assessment** should be based on a commitment between educator and learner.

The learners have to be informed clearly about the aims of the formative assessment because a general competence check about speaking skills seems to be too difficult to build up and there is the risk of asking too much from teachers and giving too much and diverse feedback to learners.

The feedback of formative assessment should, besides others,

- build on students' strengths,
- highlight students' gaps in learning goals,
- provide methods and hints for student's learning goals and
- help to improve where gaps have been discovered.
- Specific aims of a formative speaking assessment might be:
 - Communicative effectiveness (Task achievement)
 - Pronunciation
 - Social skills for communication
 - Active listening and responding
 - Language accuracy and use of vocabulary
 - Fluency

2.4. Developing competence oriented tasks

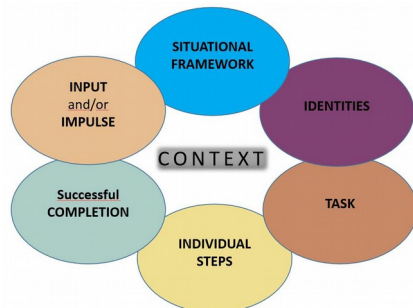
It is recommended to use topics for Level B1 and then, if needed, adjust the contents for the specific level of the students.

Important elements (theory and implementation)¹⁾

The papers testing oral competency have to consist of two separate and independent speaking tasks:
a sustained monologue and
an interactive dialogue.

Both the monologue as well as the dialogue are characterized by various fundamental elements. Both tasks of the oral exam paper must be embedded in a given **context**.

This exam context is defined in short and precise words and specifies
the **situational framework**,
the **identities** of the candidate and the audience/interlocutors,
the **task** as such,



the **individual steps** of the task and
the requirements for a successful **completion**.

In addition, tasks must contain an **input and/or impulse**.

2.5. EMECOE tasks - best practice examples

The team of EMECOE has worked out some strategies of good practice which take in account the above mentioned criteria for competence oriented tasks.

Thus, teachers are provided with material respecting situational environment, identities and input. In the case of the TELE-TANDEM learners are provided with worksheets, explaining exactly what they should talk about. They get detailed input and find steps to follow which also give enough room to be presented in an individual way.

The input on PROMPT-CARDS deals with situations of everyday life or professionally oriented situations.

PECHA KUTCHA offers plenty of opportunities to train presentation techniques and support speaking activities in form of monologues.

2.6. The role of the interlocutor

The interlocutor's behaviour is crucial for the success of the candidates, to enable them to show the maximum of their competences which are:

- Topic maintenance and management
- Intonation, pacing, pausing
- Clarification strategies (or absence of)
- Error correction or repair
- Management of turn-taking in paired section
- Elicitation of candidate-candidate interaction
- Use her/his professional (interlocutor) skills in order to provide individualised supplementary tasks/opportunities
- Body language

1) CEBS, Framework Plurilingualism – Designing and Implementing Plurilingual Oral Exams, p 9 (adapted)

In terms of the principles of LOLA we would suggest that the different parts of speaking activities consist - at least - of 3 stages:

Phase one: warming up

Phase two: interaction (dialogue)
Phase three: long turn (monologue)

2.7. The grids

General statement:

A formative speaking assessment grid differs in many ways from a summative (normative) one.

Learners enter the assessment knowing that the results do not evaluate their skills in the traditional way of giving marks.

The formative assessment will not qualify their competences and link them directly to the CEFR-criteria and descriptors with the outcome of putting them into the CEFR-boxes as an A2, B1, B2 – speaker.

Candidates will not be left alone struggling with the task, but be guided by the interlocutor who plays a crucial role to help the candidate to show the best of his communicative competences.

Questions:

1. How could a formative grid differ from the existing ones?
2. What would be the criteria / categories?
3. How could the feedback be given to allow specific answers to strengths and weaknesses?
4. Which could be the best recommendations for the learners?

2.8. A formative grid

The team came up to ask about effectiveness of existing grids concerning future learning strategies, possible improvements and helpful hints for social skills in communication.

In a very much simplified approach the following scenario was developed:

- The learner has to know about what he/she is asked to do in order to fulfil the task. (See illustrations about reporting below in German)
- The teacher's feedback-grid should clearly mention strengths and weaknesses

2.8.1. Feedback on speaking for teachers (based on presumed level A2/B1)

e.g. for ACCURACY:

Very good: "Reasonably accurate use of more unfamiliar and complex structures and expressions"

Quite weak:

"Errors and mistakes are frequent and sometimes prevent communication" or

"generally accurate use of only a few simple patterns and vocabulary"

e.g. for PRONUNCIATION:

Very good:

"stress and intonation largely appropriate and natural"

Quite weak:

"asking for repetition may sometimes be necessary"

e.g. for COMMUNICATIVE EFFECTIVENESS

Quite good:

"ideas developed mainly logically and coherently"

Very weak:

"can use the most basic linear connectors only to link single words or short phrases", ...

The teacher has to ask himself/herself, how to help the learner (according to the presumed or certified level): *What could help him/her to improve.*

2.8.2. Feedback on speaking for learners

Following the LOLA principle, the most important part is the information for the learners. Here we suggest a kind of "can do statements":

“You were able to show...

e.g. for COMMUNICATIVE EFFECTIVENESS

- how well, accurately and detailed you have completed the task
- how clearly organised you put your ideas across

e.g. for INTERACTION

- how well you can hold a conversation and respond to your partner’s ideas

e.g. for RANGE

- how wide your range of vocabulary and structures is

e.g. for ACCURACY

- how well you use the words and structures

e.g. for PRONUNCIATION

- how well other people can understand you

2.8.3. Tips for study techniques

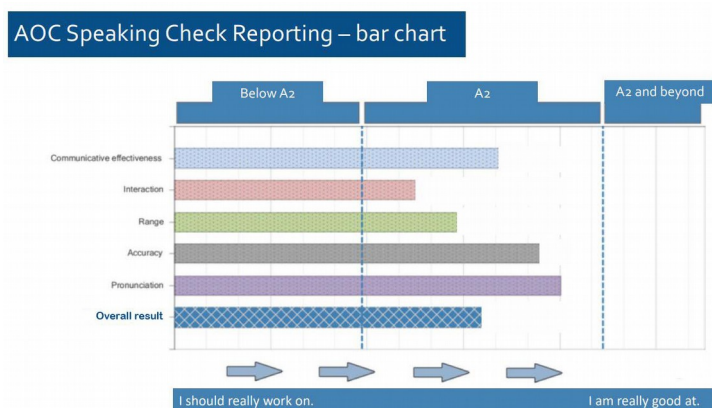
In the example taken from the AOC-Check, learners receive detailed feedback including strategies they can use to take responsibility for their learning process.

Here are some extracts taken from the tips to improve their speaking skills:

- Ask your teacher for detailed feedback.
- Get yourself talking.
- Use the foreign language also for group-work.
- Give your vocabulary and grammar a boost.
- Listen to songs, podcasts, watch TV or Youtube (try to imitate an actor...).
- Record yourself (mobile phones, etc), then listen and check / correct your own pronunciation.

LOLA puts the responsibility of learning on the learners but teachers will support their learning process through coaching. Individual consultations on e.g. learning strategies will enhance the students’ speaking skills.

One of the aims of Learning Oriented Language Assessments is to help students to become better learners.

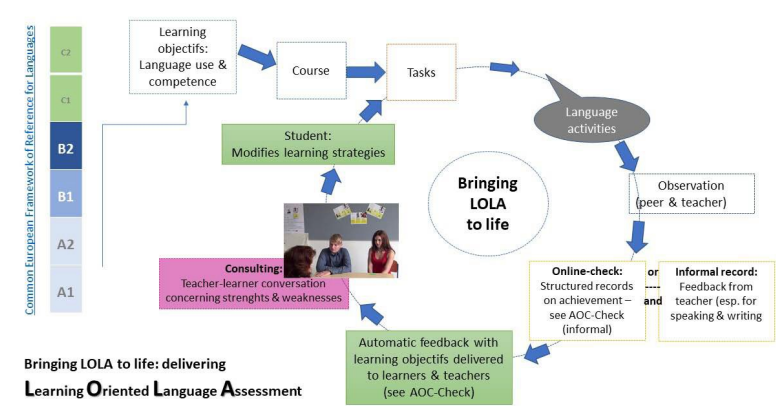


2.9. Illustrations about reporting and LOLA-principle

Chart for students shown, when digitally analysed: The graph below shows how learners get feedback about their speaking competence when teachers put marks in for digital analyses (here for the CEFR-levels A1 to A2 and beyond):

Whatever form language assessment takes, classroom based or large scale standardized, the issue should be to provide feedback or evidence, support learning and reflect on teaching strategies and learning

strategies as shown in the graph.²⁾



2) adapted from: <https://www.slideshare.net/eaquals/assessment-literacy-apr-14-fiona-barker>, slide 51

