OPI Technique in Assessing EFL Communicative Performance[1]

Assist. Prof. Dr. Hidayet TUNCAY

Abstract

Oral proficiency has been the most difficult skill to be assessed in ELT (English Language Teaching). Due to non-native teaching environment and artificial assessment and evaluation techniques, a very precise outcome has not been obtained from the oral examinations. This study focuses on how we could integrate Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) technique into assessment procedure and how graded and classified questions are to be used in OPI.

OPI is a technique designed to evaluate the learners' oral interaction performance after a certain period of training in ELT. So EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers expected to give OPI, should be given an in-service teacher training prior to implementing the technique.

This paper also covers some specific issues as for how teachers and students can overcome the problems depending on the atmosphere created during the use of technique in the final assessment. The expected problems will be studied in regard to Emotional Intelligence (EQ) in ELT.

A brief description of other similar methods in ELT is given with their specifications studied in comparison to OPI technique. Besides, institutional tailor-made oral proficiency technique will be discussed and a "Suggested Foreign Language Proficiency Level Assessment Chart" is also presented with its specifications.

1. Introduction

For almost three decades, due to various reasons, teaching of speaking skill in ELT has become increasingly important. Because EFL learners' "functional" or "communicative" ability (Higgs 1984; Mohan 1986 cited in Riggenbach & Lazaraton, 1991) has been thought to be the only ability to be assessed after the emergence of "Communicative Methodology in Language Teaching" (Brumfit, 1984) in late seventies and early eighties. So, "communicative competence" is closely related with learners' use of Target Language functionally in social life situations. The applied linguists (Canale, 1986; Canale & Swain, 1980) define these competence issues: (1) grammatical or linguistic competence, (2) sociocultural competence, (3) discourse competence, and (4) strategic competence. Most EFL teachers have taken these competences into account to promote learners' accuracy and fluency in TL through utilizing "communicative language learning activities".

All efforts, put on language skills, most presumably on speaking skill, are for the purpose of implementing speaking component in a language class to encourage the acquisiton of communication skills and to foster real communication in and out of the classroom (Riggenbach and Lazaraton, 1991). In many ELT syllabuses, implementation of speaking skill has been a priority for teachers and syllabus designers as well. Then, the assessment of the speaking/oral language skill has gained much importance in regard to finding out learners' speaking proficiency, accuracy level and also testing the performative skills in a formal setting both in classroom and in institutionally performed oral examinations.

2. Background to the Study

Communication skill, also defined oral production of the TL, has gained much significance in ELT for the last two decades. For this purpose, speaking activities and communication drills have been implemented in ELT syllabuses. The changes, having been observed in ELT, have put the "**communicative competence**" in the center of foreign language training which "entails not solely grammatical accuracy but also a knowledge of sociocultural rules of appropriateness, discourse norms, and strategies for ensuring that a communication is understood" (Riggenbach & Lazaraton,

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1991:125). Communicative competence as part of a syllabus requires some communication activities to be implemented in the classroom use in the textbooks designed. Many teachers may also have tailor-made communication activities to enforce the oral skill in and out of class. The aim of such "**fluency activites**" (Brumfit, 1984:69) is to help learners to develop foreign language interaction that is to be similar to the use of TL in real life conditions.

In the development of oral language proficiency for TL learners, "*oral language pedagogy*" (Bygate, 2001:14) seems to be a significant issue to be considered both in teaching oral skills and the assessment of the oral production. In communicative approach, learner attitude and behavior are subsequently assessed through various performance activities. Hence, communicative approach is based on two important factors: first it is a functional-notional approach which is based on functional use of notions in ELT; second, a learner-centered approach (Bygate, 2001:15) emerged which puts the learner in the center of communication activities. The nature and condition of speech and its production involve four major processes (Levelt, 1989 cited in Bygate, 2001:16): **conceptualization** which is concerned with planning the message content; **formulation/ the formulator** which finds the words and phrases to express meanings sequencing them and putting in appropriate grammatical markers; **articulation** which involves the motor control of the articulatory organs and **self-monitoring** which is concerned with language users being able to identify and self-correct mistakes.

Spoken discourse is usually **physically situated face-to-face interaction** (ibid). The oral production in ELT is usually evaluated by teachers in classroom through some specific speaking activities. However, there are some oral proficiency tests to evaluate speakers' oral proficiency. The oral proficiency evaluation tests are to be given after determining the learners' needs, and the goal should be to evaluate learners' actual oral interaction skill given through language education. So, in this paper **Oral Proficiency Interview** (OPI) technique is covered and various identical OPI tests will be discussed as well. As mentioned earlier, learners' oral language pedagogy will be studied in regard to Emotional Intelligence (EQ) to evaluate the learners' attitude and success in such oral examinations implemented in the evaluation program. The paper will also cover non-native learners' performance evaluation in a non-native ELT environment, mostly assessed by the non-native ELT teachers. Hence, the syllabus content, learners' individual abilities in oral production, communicative competence and the OPI technique to be implemented in the evaluation process are thought to be crucially important for performance assessment of ELT learners.

3. OPI in the Evaluation of Learners' Speaking Performance

OPI is a standardized test for the global assessment of functional speaking ability. It is often performed face-to-face by certified testers and the examinee's language speaking ability is determined by comparing his or her performance of specific communication tasks. The criteria of ten proficiency levels are implemented to assess the examinee's performance as follows:

ACTFL Speaking Proficiency Guidelines
Superior
Advanced High
Advanced Mid
Advanced Low
Intermediate High
Intermediate Mid
Intermediate Low
Novice High
Novice Mid
Novice Low

(*ACTFL-American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines-Speaking, revised 1999*)

Some institutions might have a different assessment scale ranging from "0" to "5" with plus levels as well. This system requires intermediary "+" levels such as, 0+, 1+, 2+, 3+, 4+ and 5 (DLIELC-Defense Language Institute English Language Center). These plus-modified levels are assigned to candidates who demonstrate inconsistent proficiency at the next higher base level.

It should be better to discuss some **key points** in the implementation of OPI in the assessment of speaking proficiency as follows:

a. **The OPI cycle**
  - Warm-up, to include autobiography
  - Level checks, to assess ability to perform linguistic tasks at a base level
  - Level probes, to determine ability to perform linguistic tasks at the next higher base level
  - Wind down

b. **Appraisal factors considered at each level (*not equally weighted*)**
Vocabulary, Grammar, Pronunciation, Fluency, Linguistic tasks, Socio-linguistic/cultural awareness

As mentioned earlier, the OPI covers 5 levels and each level demonstrates a certain type of proficiency which is determined by the certified raters. While evaluating the interviewees' proficiency level the raters can increase the difficulty level of the questions and the tasks given. Since this is not the assessment of the learners' class oral performance, each rater is not aware of the learners' class performance, so it should be easier to follow a certain criteria to implement the OPI principles in the exam setting. Each level of the OPI should be studied in advance so that the actual performance level of the interviewee can be determined rather precisely. The following are the levels to be assessed in the OPI:

c. **OPI Proficiency Levels**

Level 0 - no functional proficiency

Level 1 - survival proficiency
  - Tasks require candidates to ask/answer questions, participate in short conversations (about themselves, their families, and their backgrounds), and handle everyday "survival" situations
  - Demonstrated ability to create sentences (not just phrases or memorized dialogs) that are intelligible to native speakers used to dealing with non-native speakers
  - Comprehension of simple sentences at a slower than normal delivery rate with frequent repetition, rephrasing

Level 2 - limited working proficiency
- Tasks require candidates to demonstrate the ability to fully participate in casual conversations about themselves and the world around them, to include:
  - Describing (in concrete terms)
  - Giving instructions/directions
  - Narrating in present, past, and future
  - Handling situations with a complication
  - Demonstrated ability to speak in "paragraphs," controlling basic sentence structure and exhibiting pronunciation intelligible to native speakers not used to dealing with internationals
  - Comprehension of basic everyday speech with only occasional slowing down, repetition, and rephrasing

Level 3 - general professional proficiency
  - Tasks require candidates to demonstrate the ability to converse in formal and informal situations, including: *Resolving problem situations*, *Dealing with unfamiliar topics/situations*, *Describing in detail*, *Providing abstract explanations*, *Supporting opinions*, *Hypothesizing*
  - Demonstrated ability to use organized discourse incorporating a broad range of high- frequency abstract vocabulary and complex sentence structure with facility
  - Pronunciation and communication errors rarely interfere with a native speaker's understanding and listening comfort
  - Comprehension of everyday, technical and abstract discourse in a standard dialect

Level 4 - advanced professional proficiency

▪ Tasks require candidates to demonstrate the ability to tailor language to a variety of audiences, both formal and informal, for the purpose of: *Counseling, Persuading, Negotiating, Interpreting, Representing both sides of an issue*
  ▪ Speech represents highly organized discourse, including extensive use of complex sentence structure and both high- and low-frequency abstract vocabulary
  ▪ No patterns of pronunciation and communication errors
  ▪ Comprehension of all standard and some non-standard dialects including common slang / technical jargon

Level 5 - functionally well-educated native proficiency

(http://www.dlielc.org/testing/opi_keypoints.html accessed on February 7, 2002)

The descriptions of the OPI speaking skill levels and summary of them are given in the appendix-A. Each level pertains certain proficiency and language functions to be carried out by the examinee during OPI.

As can also be seen in some evaluation techniques, OPI has some advantages and drawbacks as well. These drawbacks and other disadvantages may be overcome through certified raters' training and of course, this technique can also be modified in accordance with the type of syllabus and utilizing other techniques implemented during ELT training.

d. Advantages and drawbacks of the OPI:

➢ Standardized method of measuring actual proficiency in language skills required to function in life / job situations
➢ Low risk of compromise
➢ Costly in terms of training and staffing requirements
➢ Reliability dependent on a human element, i.e. the competence/performance of raters

The objective assessment seems to the most important issue to be taken into consideration in OPI. However, since this is a face-to-face assessment of the speaking performance, the degree of compromise is thought to be minimum. Depending on the individual speaking performance, some of the interviewees may not be able to perform the tasks assigned clear enough. In such cases, the raters should have a definite role to ease the student during exam and help them to perform better by asking various questions. The raters are apt to increase the level of proficiency by watching the interviewee's performance in the exam. In most cases, the interviewees may not perform their actual performance depending on their individual background. The students whose performative skills have not yet been developed quite enough cannot perform their actual oral language ability. So, such students should be made familiar with the assessment technique prior to OPI assessment and the specifications of OPI technique should be explained to students during training.

OPI has some **characteristics** to be considered as follows: so it

➢ cannot be prepared as a test that measures specific information of a course.
➢ does measure *what a student can do* with the language having been taught.
➢ is given in a conversational/interview format.
➢ may require a student to ask questions.
➢ may require student to describe and compare.
➢ may include a role-play.
➢ is taped in order to assess an accurate rating.

(http://wahs.8j.net/forlan/spanish/opi.html)

Depending on the instructional level of ELT syllabus, some modifications could be done in institutional OPI assessment. There might be some other characteristics to be drawn from the implementation of the technique after conducting a survey and a detailed needs analysis of the learners. Besides, the descriptions of the proficiency level could be prepared in collaboration with other techniques used in assessing the speaking performance level implemented by some other institutions.

4. OPI and Other Similar Oral Proficiency Assessment Techniques

Other than OPI, there are certain techniques used in the assessment of oral language proficiency. *Student Oral Proficiency Assessment* (SOPA) (Rhodes and Thompson, CAL, 2002) is thought to be an appropriate instrument for measuring oral proficiency of elementary school students. This technique is administered to students who had completed at least two years of language study (http://www.edu.iastate.edu/nflrc/newsletter/painit.html-)

Next is *Computerized Oral Proficiency Assessment* (COPA) is an adaptation of the Chinese Speaking Test developed by the Center of Applied Linguistics in the U.S. The specifications of this technique are as follows:

➢ The examinee hears the test directions and questions in their mother tongue from the computer
➢ The examinees answer the questions in the foreign language they are learning
➢ The responses are recorded and stored in the computer
➢ The recorded responses are evaluated by two specially trained COPA raters
➢ The test lasts approximately 45 minutes
➢ The test covers a wide range of topics and fulfills the speaking functions
➢ Each COPA task presents the examinee with a speaking task of a defined level of difficulty

(http://www.chuk.edu.hk/clc/e-copa.html)

The rationale behind the scoring in COPA is to find the level at which the examinee consistently fulfills the speaking functions. This technique also utilizes the ACTFL guidelines describing the aspects of speech characterizing speakers at different levels of proficiency.

Computerized Oral Proficiency Instrument (COPI) is another technique which utilizes technology to address affective concerns by introducing examinee control over topic selection and planning/response time, and by introducing an adaptive algorithm in order to present examinees with speaking tasks that are not overly easy or difficult. The (technical) specifications of COPI are as follows:

- **Students prefer COPI because it**
  a. seems less difficult overall,
  b. features a fairer set of questions and situations,
  c. makes them feel less nervous,
  d. has clearer directions, and
  e. enables a more accurate depiction of their strengths, weaknesses, and current abilities to speak in the target language.

Technical Specifications of COPI:
- Tape recordings with computer-based digital audio recordings,
- Computerized recordings prove beneficial for raters,
- CD ROM-based or Web-based formats of the COPI can be easily integrated with internet technology,
- Recorded examinee performances are automatically distributed to certified raters as data files,
- First examinees are asked to assess their own speaking abilities,
- Then, the computer suggests a starting difficulty level for tasks
- Examinees are allowed to select subsequent tasks that are easier or more difficult than the task just completed,
- Somewhat more difficult tasks are automatically presented in order to probe the upper limits of an examinee's abilities (Norris, 2001).

Norris (2001) makes a distinctive comparison between COPI and SOPI (explained below) that "potential improvements on the SOPI in terms of examinee affective variables, the COPI offers distinct advantages in eliciting examinee performances and in facilitating the rating process." COPI seems easier in administering than SOPI or OPI, because the computer program does away with the

need for a test proctor or interviewer to distribute and collect test materials, to monitor and advance test activities and to capture examinee performances. COPI also eliminates one common source of error found in SOPIs by automatically assigning final global ratings based on scoring algorithm rather than leaving this sometimes complex and difficult task up to raters. In this computer adaptive scoring, the human element and non-objective rating problem is solved.

Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI) (Stansfield and Dorry, 1996) is an oral performance-based speaking test which elicits speech by means of a tape recording and printed test booklet. The following are the **specifications of SOPI**:

* It begins with simple personal background questions posed on the tape in a simulated initial encounter with a native speaker,
* The examinee records a short answer to each question,
* It contains performance-based tasks,
* Picture-based tasks may require examinees to demonstrate the ability to ask questions about pictures; give directions to someone using map; describe a particular place based on a drawing; narrate a sequence of events in the present, past, or future,
* Requires examinees to speak on selected topics and perform real-life situations,
* It consists of a test tape containing all test instructions and test items,
* Native speaker makes a statement or asks a question appropriate to the situation described,
* It ends with a wind-down consisting of easy questions in the target language aiming to put the examinee at ease.

SOPI is preferred because it
* can be administered simultaneously to a group of examinees by a single administrator,
* needs a short span of time,
* offers psychometric advantages in terms of validity and reliability,
* offers the same quality of interview to each examinee (Stansfield and Dorry, 1996).

SOPI includes a master test tape including the audio tape of all test instructions and tasks. All directions are presented in English in the test booklet and on the test tape. The directions provide the context of each speaking task and also include other relevant information. After listening to and reading the directions, the examinee hears a native speaker make a statement or ask a question relevant to the task described, then the examinee performs the task by responding to the native speaker prompt (Malone, 2000 - Eric ED447729).

However, SOPI proved to be slightly more reliable and easier to rate than OPI, if the scores obtained are to be used for placement or diagnosis in an instructional program and a competent interviewer is available, it is preferable to administer an OPI. Besides, OPI is sometimes preferred for program evaluation purposes which can provide qualitative information.

5. Sample Format of OPI for Institutional Purposes

In this part of the study only 0, 1, 2 and 3 levels are covered as a sample format of the OPI to be utilized for institutional purposes. As mentioned earlier, OPI has 6 levels with "+" modification. In an OPI setting, the certified raters may have some simple warm-up questions to ask the interviewees. After the warm-up questions, the raters ask various questions so that they can find out what level the interviewees can go up. The following are 0-3 levels to be considered for this sample format:

* **Level 0:** Speakers at this level have no proficiency in the language.
   At this level, the raters find out that student does not have any speaking proficiency level and they do not move ahead. Only simple warm-up questions are asked,
* **Level 1:** Speakers at this level have the ability to participate in short conversations, ask and answer questions about themselves, their families, their background, and handle everyday "survival" situations. So the "Survival" topics include the following:
   o Ordering a meal in a restaurant
   o Obtaining a hotel room

- o   Making all arrangements for travel
- o   Changing money Telling time; identifying days, weeks, months
- o   Talking on the telephone
- o   Asking directions (in a building/city/rural area)
- o   Purchasing items in stores
- o   Making introductions
- o   Using appropriate social greetings and social clichés; i.e. (excuse me, sorry, I'm late, etc.)
- o   Describing basic medical problems
- o   Describing personal background
- o   Describing personal comfort requirements (hunger, thirst, etc.) Issuing invitations
- o   Asking people to restate for clarity

Sample questions can be listed as follows:
- -   Can I have a beefsteak please?
- -   Can I make a reservation for tomorrow night?
- -   What time does the plane to Los Angeles leave? Can I make a reservation to London for 8:00 a.m. flight? When am I supposed to pick up the ticket? etc.
- -   Can I change dollar here? Or Is there any exchange office around here?
- -   Could I talk to the head manager of the company?
- -   Could you spell your name again please?
- -   How can I go the shopping mall from here? Or
- -   You go straight ahead and turn left it is on your left hand side.
- -   Could you help me find a large size shirt please? Or
- -   Can I pay with my credit card or should I pay in cash?
- -   Miss. Anderson, could I introduce you to my friend Jane?
- -   Sorry, I'm late. Could I come in?
- -   I have a headache. Where can I find a doctor?
- -   I'm from Turkey. I'm an English teacher at a private school and I have been teaching English for 3 years. etc.
- -   I haven't eaten anything for today. I'm very hungry. Where can I find a good restaurant?
- -   Could you repeat what you have said please?

- **Level 2:** speakers can talk about themselves and the world around them. They are able to fully participate in casual conversations; can express facts; give instructions; give directions; describe; report on and provide narration about past, present, and future activities. They can handle "non-routine" situations; lack of language would not prevent them from solving a situation with a complication. They generally speak in "paragraphs" and control basic sentence structures, including present, past, and future tenses. The topics include: *Background*, *Family*, *Interests*, *Work*, *Travel*, *Current Events*

Sample questions to be asked can be listed as follows: (*The raters may ask the following questions during OPI*)

- *Background-related questions:*
    - -   Could you tell us about your personal and professional background please? This question may require the following subheadings: Your family, children, meetings, your wife / husband / mother /father /sister / brother, etc. Your activities in the family.
    - -   Do you get along well with your family?
    - -   What is the best/worst memory of your childhood?
- *Job-related questions:*
    - -   Where do you work?
    - -   Why did you choose this job?
    - -   How long have you been working in this job?
    - -   If you had a chance, what other job would you choose? etc.
- *Holiday-related questions:*

- How often do you go on vacation?
- Do you like traveling?
- Where did you go last summer?
- Did you meet any interesting people?
- What was the most interesting event you had in your vacation?
- What type of holiday do you like?
- Could you describe your last vacation? etc.

- *Current events-related questions*
    - What are the most current events in your country?
    - Do the current events affect your life?
    - Do you like discussing current events with your friends?
    - How do the current events affect your family, professional life? Etc.

- **Level 3:** speakers can converse in formal and informal situations, resolve problem situations, deal with unfamiliar topics, provide explanations, describe in detail, offer supported opinions, and hypothesize. Speakers at this level use complex sentence structures with frequency and facility, and their broad vocabulary includes many abstract nouns. Their pronunciation and communication errors almost never interfere with a native speaker's understanding and listening comfort. Level 3 topics include: *Practical issues, Social concerns, Professional subjects, Abstractions, Particular interests, Special fields of competence*

Sample questions can be listed as follows:
- How do you handle a conflict between fathers/mothers and sons/daughters?
- Why do you learn a foreign language? etc.
- What should be done to overcome poverty in the world?
- Should rich countries help poor nations in the world?
- What do you think about generation gap?
- What should the governments do to help elderly/ poverty stricken people?
- How do you think money helps make us happy?
- What are the environmental concerns in your country?
- Do you think sports helps people work well as a team at work?
- How do you think countries can reduce congestion on the roads?
- What are the qualities of a good education?
- Do women usually work after they get married in your country? etc.
- At what age do people usually retire in your country?
- Do you think it is more important to make a lot of money or to enjoy your job?
- How many hours a week do you work?
- Name three occupations that you could do.
- How do you like your work? Describe your current job.
- How do people choose their profession in your country? etc.
- What makes you happy?
- What is the definition of love from your point of view?
- Why do you think honesty is the best policy?
- Do you believe in UFOs?
- Have you had a dream that later came true?
- Do you think getting married means giving up freedom?
- What advice would you give to someone whose partner hates their best friend?
- What makes a good husband/wife?
- What qualities are important to you to become a good friend? etc.
- What is your most favorite interest?
- What should the older people do to make themselves busy?
- What particular areas are you interested in making a good career?
- What is the specific job you would like to be involved in?

- What do you usually do in your free time particularly? etc.
- Why did you want to become an English teacher/engineer/doctor etc.?
- How do you think you can become more competent in your present job?
- What do you want to specialize in when you finish your school?
- Are you good at computer?
- How do you think an artist can become more competent?
- If you have a chance, in what area would you like to specialize in? Why? etc.

The questions above are asked the interviewee during OPI and if the raters feel that the interviewee is competent enough, they increase the difficulty level of the questions in order to push the interviewee up to a higher level of proficiency. The number of questions can be increased and the raters may also assess the interviewees with "+" proficiency levels as well. The raters will take the interviewees' competency level into consideration more than their knowledge of professional subjects, and they pay close attention to how they use the language rather than what they say. Besides, the interviewee should not try to affect the raters with their points of interest while being interviewed.

6. Conclusion

OPI is a unique method to evaluate the EFL learners' speaking proficiency in regard to implemented course format or given syllabus. Every student should be given OPI assessment by the trained/certified raters. The raters should be made familiar with the rating instructions in in-service ELT teacher training. The foreign language learners may encounter with some specific problems while implementing OPI technique end-of-course assessment. The problems or inconveniences should be overcome with the help of both raters and teachers in advance.

The anxiety, erratic manners, self-motivation, may be said to be the most important issues to take into consideration while giving OPI for the first time. So, in this case, the teachers'/raters' Emotional Intelligence (EQ) might play a very crucial role to motivate the candidates during OPI. The raters are expected to have a high level of EQ because their attitudes in such a face-to-face oral proficiency assessment may affect the candidates' performance. The term "empathy" which Goleman (1998) emphasizes it as "sensing others' feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns," should be paid special attention by the raters. The raters are not there to demoralize the interviewees and distract their attentions while giving OPI. Their high concern of the candidates' psychological situation might help them to have better results from the OPI. The raters should not interfere with the candidates' speaking performance even though they purposefully deviate from the task given.

For almost two decades the Council of Europe has had a **six-scale draft proposal framework** (see appendix-B). It has also **teacher assessment grid** describing aspects of spoken performance. Many European countries are to apply the assessment criteria in their syllabus and proficiency assessment.

In foreign language teaching in our country, most schools have adapted criteria of performance evaluation. On institutional bases, it seems quite significant that every institution should have its own performance evaluation and assessment criteria. For this purpose, the following suggested Foreign Language Proficiency level assessment chart is to be taken into account with its specifications:

Suggested Foreign Language Proficiency Level Assessment Chart				
Level No	Proficiency Codes	Letter Coding	Proficiency Levels *(out of 5+)*	Numerical Rates *(out of 100)*
1	Low (False) Beginner	LB	0	0 – 5
2	Beginner	B	-1	6-10
3	High Beginner	HB	1	11-15
4	Pre-Elementary	PE	1+	16-20
5	Elementary	E	-2	21-25
6	Upper-Elementary	UE	2	26-30
7	Pre – Intermediate	PI	2+	31-35
8	Intermediate	I	-3	36 - 40
9	Upper – Intermediate	UI	3	41 - 50
10	Low – Advanced	LA	3+	51 - 65
11	Advanced	A	-4	66 - 75
12	High – Advanced	HA	4	76 - 85
13	Near - Native	NN	4+	86 - 90
14	Native Speaker	NS	5	91 - 95
15	Educated Native Speaker	ENS	5+	96 - 100

Specifications:
- Students' performance can be evaluated in four skills,
- For each skill, students' grade can be determined separately,
- In OPI students can be evaluated through numerical rates depending on the course followed,
- This chart can also be used after any placement test given,
- The proficiency codes may not correlate with the course book studied,
- This chart should be implemented after a thorough assessment of students' proficiency in four integrated skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking,
- After any Proficiency test given, students' actual language performance can be determined using the chart above as well.

   The chart above can be used for four language skills during instructional period and/or at the end of school year to evaluate students' performance level. This might also be accepted as a preliminary chart and it can be modified after certain surveys, needs analysis, questionnaires and most importantly action-research. In most countries in which English has been taught as a second or foreign language, the assessment criteria may contain so many variables depending on the institutional expectancies and curriculum followed. This acronym might help us to determine our assessment principle: **"**MAFIA" - **M**easuring of the **A**chievement of **F**unctions through **I**nteractive language **A**ssessment. Interagency Language Roundtable Language Skill Level Descriptions (for four language skills) have been effectively implemented in the USA since 1985. It has level description for each skill (ranging from "0" to "5" including "+" version too). So, countries who have been teaching (EFL) should have such level assessment descriptions pertaining to their method of instruction of the foreign language. OPI or any other means of evaluation technique should serve the purpose of defining and measuring EFL learners' actual language performance / competence in both receptive (reading/listening) and performative (speaking/writing) skills.

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OPI SPEAKING SKILL LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS

LEVEL 0 (*no proficiency*)

- Unable to function in the spoken language.
- Oral production is limited to occasional isolated words such as greetings or basic courtesy formulae.
- Has no communicative ability.

LEVEL 0+ (*memorized proficiency*)

- Able to satisfy immediate needs using memorized, rehearsed utterances.
- Can ask questions or make statements with reasonable accuracy only with memorized material.
- Attempts at creating speech are usually unsuccessful.
- Vocabulary is usually limited to areas of immediate survival needs.
- Most utterances are telegraphic; linking words and markers are omitted, confused, or distorted.
- Even with repetition, communication is severely limited, even with people used to speaking with non-natives.
- Stress, intonation, and tone are usually quite faulty even in memorized speech.

LEVEL 1 (*elementary proficiency*)

- Able to maintain simple face-to-face communication in typical everyday situations.
- Can create with the language by combining and recombining familiar, learned elements of speech.
- Can begin, maintain, and close short conversations by asking and answering short simple questions.
- Can typically satisfy simple, predictable, personal and accommodation needs; meet minimum courtesy, introduction, and identification requirements; exchange greetings; elicit and provide predictable, skeletal biographical information; communicate about simple routine tasks in the workplace; ask for goods, services, and assistance; request information and clarification; express satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and confirmation.
- Topics include basic needs such as ordering meals, obtaining lodging and transportation, shopping.
- Native speakers used to speaking with non-natives must often strain, request repetition, and use real-world knowledge to understand this speaker.
- Seldom speaks with natural fluency, and cannot produce continuous discourse, except with rehearsed material.
- Nonetheless, can speak at the sentence level and may produce strings of two or more simple, short sentences joined by common linking words.
- Frequent errors in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar often distort meaning. Time concepts are vague.
- May often use only one tense or tend to avoid certain structures.
- Speech is often characterized by hesitations, erratic word order, frequent pauses, straining and groping for words (except for routine expressions), ineffective reformulations, and self-corrections.

LEVEL 2 (*limited working proficiency*)

- Able to communicate in everyday social and routine workplace situations. The speaker can
    - describe people, places, and things;
    - narrate current, past, and future activities in complete, but simple paragraphs;
    - state facts;
    - compare and contrast; give straightforward instructions and directions;
    - ask and answer predictable questions.
- Can confidently handle most normal, casual conversations on concrete topics such as job procedures, family, personal background and interests, travel, current events.
- Can often elaborate in common daily communicative situations, such as personal and accommodation-related interactions; for example, can give complicated, detailed, and extensive directions and make non-routine changes in travel and other arrangements.
- Can interact with native speakers not used to speaking with non-natives, although natives may have to adjust to some limitations.
- Can combine and link sentences into paragraph-length discourse.
- Simple structures and basic grammatical relations are typically controlled, while more complex structures are used inaccurately or avoided.
- Vocabulary use is appropriate for high-frequency utterances but unusual or imprecise at other times.
- Errors in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar may sometimes distort meaning.
- However, the individual generally speaks in a way that is appropriate to the situation, although command of the spoken language is not always firm.

LEVEL 3 (*minimum professional proficiency*)

- Able to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics.
- Can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with considerable ease.
- Can use the language to perform such common professional tasks as answering objections, clarifying points, justifying decisions, responding to challenges, supporting opinion, stating and defending policy.
- Can demonstrate language competence when conducting meetings, delivering briefings or other extended and elaborate monologues, hypothesizing, and dealing with unfamiliar subjects and situations.
- Can reliably elicit information and informed opinion from native speakers.
- Can convey abstract concepts in discussions of complex topics (which may include economics, culture, science, technology) as well as his/her professional field.
- Produces extended discourse and conveys meaning correctly and effectively.
- Use of structural devices is flexible and elaborate.
- Speaks readily and in a way that is appropriate to the situation.
- Without searching for words or phrases, can use the language clearly and relatively naturally to elaborate on concepts freely and make ideas easily understandable to native speakers.
- May not fully understand some cultural references, proverbs, and allusions, as well as implications of nuances and idioms, but can easily repair the conversation.
- Pronunciation may be obviously foreign.
- Errors may occur in low frequency or highly complex structures characteristic of a formal style of speech.
- However, occasional errors in pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary are not serious enough to distort meaning, and rarely disturb the native speaker.

LEVEL 4 (*full professional proficiency*)

- Uses the language with great precision, accuracy, and fluency for all professional purposes including the representation of an official policy or point of view.
- Can perform highly sophisticated language tasks, involving most matters of interest to well-educated native speakers, even in unfamiliar general or professional-specialist situations.
- Can readily tailor his/her use of the language to communicate effectively with all types of audiences.
- Demonstrates the language skills needed to counsel or persuade others.
- Can set the tone of both professional and non-professional verbal exchanges with a wide variety of native speakers.
- Can easily shift subject matter and tone and adjust to such shifts initiated by other speakers. Communicates very effectively with native speakers in situations such as conferences, negotiations, lectures, presentations, briefings, and debates on matters of disagreement.
- Can elaborate on abstract concepts and advocate a position at length in these circumstances.
- Topics may come from such areas as economics, culture, science, and technology, as well as from his/her professional field.
- Organizes discourse well, conveys meaning effectively, and uses stylistically appropriate discourse features.
- Can express nuances and make culturally appropriate references.
- Speaks effortlessly and smoothly, with a firm grasp of various levels of style, but would seldom be perceived as a native speaker.
- Nevertheless, any shortcomings, such as non-native pronunciation, do not interfere with intelligibility.

LEVEL 5 (*native / bilingual proficiency*)
- Speaking proficiency is functionally equivalent to that of a highly articulate well-educated native speaker and reflects the cultural standards of the country or areas where the language is natively spoken.
- The speaker uses the language with great flexibility so that all speech, including vocabulary, idioms, colloquialisms, and cultural references, is accepted as native by well-educated native listeners.
- Pronunciation is consistent with that of well-educated native speakers of a standard dialect.

http://www.dlielc.org/testing/opi.html BILC (Bureau for International Language Co-ordination) visited on February 7, 2002

ORAL PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW (OPI) Summary of Speaking Proficiency Levels

Level 0 (No Proficiency)
- No functional ability.
- **Level 1 (Survival)**
- Creates with language.
- Can participate in short conversations.
- Can satisfy basic survival needs; can get into, through, and out of simple situations.
- Can ask and answer questions.
- Comprehensible to native speakers used to dealing with foreigners.
- **Level 2 (Concrete)**
- Can participate in conversations about own background and everyday life: family, interests, work, travel, familiar current events.
- Can describe, narrate, explain processes, and give instructions and directions.
- Can get into, through, and out of situations with complications.
- Uses past, present, and future substantially correctly.
- Comprehensible to native speakers not used to dealing with foreigners.
- **Level 3 (Abstract)**
- Can converse informally and formally about concrete and abstract topics.
- Can hypothesize, support opinions, and resolve problem situations.
- Can speak about unfamiliar situations. " Actually thinks in the target language.
- **Level 4 (Advanced Professional)**
- Can tailor language according to the situation and listeners.
- Can counsel, persuade, and advise.
- Exhibits no pattern of grammatical errors.
- Well-organized discourse.
- **Level 5 (Equivalent to Well-Educated Native Speaker)**
- Speech equivalent to that of a well-educated native speaker of a unstigmatized dialect.

http://www.dlielc.org/testing/opi_levels.html accessed on February 7, 2002

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Appendix-B

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TEACHER ASSESSMENT GRID: ASPECTS OF SPOKEN PERFORMANCE:

	RANGE	ACCURACY	FLUENCY	INTERACTION	COHERENCE
M Mastery	Shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity. Also has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).	Can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.	Can interact with ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and intonational cues apparently effortlessly. Can Interweave his/her contribution into the joint discourse with fully natural turntaking, referencing, allusion making etc.	Can create coherent and cohesive discourse making full and appropriate use of a variety of organisational patterns and a wide range of connectors and other cohesive devices
E	Has a good command of a	Consistently	Can express him/herself	Can select a suitable	Can produce clear,

Effective Operational Proficiency	broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express him/herself clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general, academic professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say	maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare, difficult to spot, and generally corrected when they do occur.	fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.	phrase from a readily available range of discourse functions to preface his remarks appropriately in order to get or to keep the floor and to relate his/her own contributions skilfully to those of other speakers.	smoothly-flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
V+ Vantage Plus					
V Vantage	Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions and express viewpoints on most general topics, without much conspicuous searching for words, using some complex sentence forms to do so.	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstanding, and can correct most of his/her mistakes.	Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although he/she can be hesitant as he or she searches for patterns and expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses.	Can initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly. Can help the discussion along on familiar ground confirming comprehension, inviting others in, etc.	Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some jumpiness in a long contribution.
T+ Threshold Plus					
T Threshold	Has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circumlocutions on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events.	Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used routines and patterns associated with more predictable situations.	Can keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production.	Can initiate, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm mutual understanding.	Can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points.
W+ Waystage Plus					
W Waystage	Uses basic sentence patterns with memorised phrases, groups of a few words and formulae in order to communicate limited information in simple everyday situations.	Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes.	Can make him/herself understood in very short utterances, even though pauses, false starts and reformulation are very evident.	Can ask and answer questions and respond to simple statements. Can indicate when he/she is following but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord.	Can link groups of words with simple connectors like and, but and because.
B Break through	Has a very basic repertoire of words and simple phrases related to personal details and particular concrete situations.	Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a memorised repertoire.	Can manage very short, isolated, mainly pre-packaged utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate less familiar words, and to repair communication.	Can ask and answer questions about personal details. Can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition, rephrasing and repair.	Can link words or groups of words with very basic linear connectors like and or then.

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GLOBAL SCALE
Adopted for the draft Proposal for a Council of Europe Common Framework

C2 Mastery	**Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously and very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.**
C1 Effective Operational Proficiency	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning.. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of

	organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
B2 Vantage	**Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.**
B1 Threshold	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
A2 Waystage	**Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.**
A1 Breakthrough	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

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HOLISTIC SCALE FOR INTERACTION

INTERACTION	
Mastery	Has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of connotative levels of meaning. Can convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices. Can backtrack and restructure around a difficulty so smoothly the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.
Effective Operational Proficiency	Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions. There is little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies; only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.
Vantage Plus	Can use the language fluently, accurately and effectively on a wide range of general, academic, vocational or leisure topics, marking clearly the relationships between ideas. Can communicate spontaneously with good grammatical control without much sign of having to restrict what he/she wants to say, adopting a level of formality appropriate to the circumstances.
Vantage	Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without imposing strain on either party. Can highlight the personal significance of events and experiences and account for and sustain views clearly by providing relevant explanations and arguments.
Threshold Plus	Can communicate with some confidence on familiar routine and non-routine matters related to his/her interests and professional field. Can exchange, check and confirm information, deal with less routine situations and explain why something is a problem. Can express thoughts on more abstract, cultural topics such as films, books, music etc.
Threshold	Can exploit a wide range of simple language to deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling. Can enter unprepared into conversation on familiar topics, express personal opinions and exchange information on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).
Waystage Plus	Can interact with reasonable ease in structured situations and short conversations, provided the other person helps if necessary. Can manage simple, routine exchanges without undue effort; can ask and answer questions and exchange ideas and information on familiar topics in predictable everyday situations.
Waystage	Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar matters to do with work and free time. Can handle very short social exchanges but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord.
Breakthrough	Can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition at a slower rate of speech, rephrasing and repair. Can ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.
Tourist	Can ask and tell the date and time of day, follow short, simple directions and make simple purchases where pointing or other gesture can support the verbal reference.

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