

PRACTICAL TEST-ORIENTED SPEAKING TASK

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The reality and practical experience in teaching English speaking skill for second-year students in FETE, ULIS has reflected some weaknesses owned by the students themselves and difficulties which challenge the teachers here well as.

Such a context has fostered the initiative to design the Test-Oriented Speaking Task, first, *to facilitate the teachers* to adapt scheduled curriculum effectively in accordance with the students' English level and their language competence. At the same time, the designed task is aimed at *enabling the students* to develop their potential language ability and improve their language performance alike to get them better-prepared for speaking tasks in the oral test.

The three primary bases for the Test-Oriented Speaking Task are *language base*, namely language focus, language achievement, language performance and language competence required, *task base* including the format of the final test given and suggested speaking tasks provided, *base on the course objectives* which are speaking contents and speaking skills.

The Test-Oriented Speaking Task is constituted of three main components: *practicing activities* consisting of pronunciation practice activities, situation practice activities and topic discussion questions, *suggested answers*, and *language reference*.

In fact, the Test-Oriented Speaking Task is a comprehensive and practical series of activities which are designed from the practical needs of teaching English speaking skill in Division 2, FETE, ULIS with numerous benefits for both students and teachers. Accordingly, some suggestions for further study in the related area are also offered.

I. Introduction

I.1. Rationale

The initiative of designing the Test-Oriented Speaking Task first resulted from the realization of students' slow improvement in using the language correctly and appropriately as well as their slow and inappropriate responses to task fulfillment at the final oral test. Then, students' week average competence in language performance in required communicative contexts has also been discovered.

In additions, many teachers have found that the lack of class-time for teaching a foreign language in such a context of the large-size class of about 25 to 30 students challenges them

to develop appropriate and effective practicing speaking activities and to correct mistakes or give feedback to their students. Actually, they hardly find a chance to help each individual in the class to recognize and correct his/her mistakes.

This observation and teaching at FETE, ULIS experience has inspired us to design a complete and practical Test-Oriented Speaking Task to facilitate teachers of English and second-year students to deal with the challenges and to overcome their weaknesses respectively.

I.2. Primary bases for the task

This set of course guide schedule-based activities, which is specially designed for gifted students of English at intermediate and upper-intermediate level, involves three principal factors. They are *language base*, namely language focus, language achievement, language performance and language competence required, *task base* including the format of the final test given and suggested speaking tasks provided, the *base on the course objectives* which are speaking contents and speaking skills.

I.3. Aims of the task

The creation of this practical test-oriented speaking task aims at:

- enabling the teacher to adapt scheduled curriculum effectively in accordance with students' English level and competence.
- enabling students to develop their potential language ability and improve their language performance.
- getting students prepared for speaking tasks in the oral test.
- building up students' confidence and flexibility in the use of language

II. Task description

The set of speaking task consists of three main parts, which are *practicing activities* including *pronunciation practice*, *situation practice* and *topic discussion*, *suggested answers* and *language reference*.

II.1. Practicing activities

PART 1 – Pronunciation Practice

1. General description and objectives

This is a kind of controlled practice and is designed for students to practice the *target sounds* in a certain lesson at difference levels of required difficulty and length, namely the practice of *combination of sounds in words*, the practice of *utterances containing the target sounds in sentences*, the practice of *connected speech with the target sounds in a paragraph* in order to enable students to improve their accuracy in pronunciation of an individual the target sound, or target sounds in combination with such other aspects of connected speech as *stress placement*, *pauses*, *rhythm* and *intonation*. This activity is also aims at forming the students' habit of self-checking the pronunciation and stress placement of words in the dictionary.

2. Sample task

Pronounce correctly the following target sounds /iə/, /eə / and /uə / in the different contexts:

a. in the following words

<i>/iə/</i>	<i>/eə /</i>	<i>/uə /</i>
career	share	<i>gourmet</i>
material	mayor	<i>sure</i>
cheer	pharaoh	<i>tourist</i>

b. in the following sentences

- Nobody *really* know why my *dear* friend has *disappeared*.
- What should I *wear* when I go *there* with my *parents*.
- The pleasures of city life *lured* the *poor* man.

c. in the following paragraph

Bere decided to have a *tour* to a *luxurious* city last month. When he came *there*, he firstly went to a casino and lost half of his money because it's *unfair there*. Then, he visited some famous places in that city and stopped in a *gourmet* restaurant. He found that with the same product the cost *there* is 2 times expensive than the cost in his town. At the end, he knew why it is a *luxurious* city, it's just because people come *here* just spend a lot of money.

PART 2 – Situation Practice

1. General description and objectives

This is another kind of controlled practice which is designed for students to practice **target language items** including *vocabulary* and *grammatical structures* on the basis of different language aspects: *language performance*, *language knowledge* and *skills* in order to achieve certain following objectives:

- **focus on accuracy:** students are required to practice using appropriate target language items to do the task given.
- **focus on fluency:** students are asked to practice producing appropriate responses in certain situations using the required target language items as their input.
- **focus on task fulfillment:** the practice enables students to know how to deal with and fulfill the requirements of the given task

2. Sample task

Two sample situations which will be introduced here is designed on the basis of the newly-learnt target language items for the purpose of practicing the target vocabulary (in Unit 4 – Adrenaline) and the target grammatical structure (in Unit 10 - Age)

In the first situation, students are required to employ emotional adjectives or adjectives of feeling like *happy, scared, excited, depressed* and *angry* ... to express their personal emotional status in a particular moment.

* **Situation 1 (Unit 4 - Adrenalin)**

- Describe a moment when you **felt a rush of extreme adrenalin** (*happy, scared, excited, depressed, angry...*)

- You should say at least:

+ *Where you were*

+ *What exactly happened*

+ *How you felt*

The second situation requires students to apply IF-conditional sentence type 3 in subjunctive mood – *if have done, would have done* to talk about their regrets of what they did in the past.

* **Situation 2 (Unit 15 - Age)**

- Describe a situation when you **made a wrong decision** and you felt regret then

- You should say at least:

+ *What the decision was*

+ *When you made up your mind*

+ *Who was involved in the case*

+ *What you wish you would have done*

PART 3 – Topics for discussion

1. General description and objectives

This is a kind of free practice which is designed to bring equal opportunities for students to actively make use of the newly-learnt target language knowledge in a series of lessons and develop their utterance in connected speech to meet their communicative needs in a certain context.

The practice activity requires the presence or realization of students' *language performance, language knowledge, language skills* and *logical thinking* with the achievement of the following objectives:

- **focus on accuracy:** to achieve this requirement, students are supposed to apply ample topic-related words, phrases, expressions, structures ... to express their ideas in the most appropriate and effective way in a certain context of communication.

- **focus on fluency:** the second requirement challenges students to practice producing appropriate utterances to express connected ideas in speech when they have communicative purposes and demands related to different themes which they have learnt in particular lessons.

- **focus on task fulfillment:** the practice of the task facilitates students to know how to deal with and fulfill the questions provided on various topics they have encountered and explored in different lessons.

- **focus on idea arrangement and development:** to obtain this requirement, the students are expected to know how to utilize not only appropriately but also effectively a number cohesive devices to link ideas clearly as well as logically (within and between main and subsidiary points alike).

2. Sample task

Two sample theme-based sets of questions which are to be introduced here require students to keep talking at length and develop utterances making best use of the vocabulary related to the topics of children and time management in Unit 5 - *Kids* and in Unit 10 - *Time* respectively. Students are also advised to use effective cohesive markers to arrange, maintain and link their ideas in spoken context of practicing the target language.

* **Unit 5 - Kids**

Discuss one of the following questions:

- *How to educate a kid effectively?*
- *What qualities of a good child or a good parent are?*
- *How is children's thinking changing in the last 15 years?*

* **Unit 10 - Time**

Discuss one of the following questions:

- *How to balance your study/work and your recreation?*
- *What are advantages of effective time management?*
- *Should students arrange time to have a part-time job? Why and why not?*

II.2. Suggested answers

This task is intentionally designed to facilitate students with the preparation of necessary target areas of language knowledge and practice the task more effectively.

Two sample answers with suggested target language items for the two situations introduced in II.1 – Part 2 will be presented here.

*** Situation 1 (Unit 4 - Adrenalin)**

+ **Where** (*place*): at home/ at school/ at work/ in the park/ in the neighbourhood/ in the car/ in the class/ on the street/ on the bus ...

+ **What** (*events/ activities*): a row with a family member/ a crash/ a collision/ a celebration/ a party ...

+ **How** (*feelings and emotions*): delighted/ light-hearted/ pleasant/ gratified/ depressed/ hopeless/ blue/ awful/ unhappy/ shocked/ horrified/ frightened/ fearful/ scared/ anxious/ uneasy/ furious/ devastated/ annoyed ...

*** Situation 2 (Unit 15 - Age)**

+ **What** (*decisions*): choosing a wrong major or university/ splitting up with the partner/ fastening a quarrel on a friend or a family member or a neighbourer/ missing a chance to buy a preferred belonging ...

+ **When** (*time*): a long time ago (in the childhood)/ recently (last week/ month/year) ...

+ **Who** (*people*): family members/ best or close friend(s)/ classmates/ neighbourers/ partner...

+ **What** (*things*): I felt sorry/ I wish I would (not) have done We should think twice before telling or doing such a thing ...

II.3. Language reference

This task is designed with the aims at helping students to recall and collect all the related language items, both general and target alike, serving as ready-made tools for students to use when practicing the given speaking activities. Here is an example for the language reference prepared for Unit 4 -Adrenalin

1. Giving your opinion:

- Personally, I (don't) think that
- I think
- In my opinion,
- I believe that
- As for me,
- It seems to me that

2. Agreement and disagreement:

Agree

- I think you are right.
- I think so.
- I agree with you.

Disagree

- I'm not sure whether I agree with you...
- I'm afraid that I don't agree at all, ...
- I agree in some ways/ with you in

- I can't agree with you more.
- You're absolutely right.
- I totally/ completely/ partly agree.
- That's exactly what I think.

- principle, but ...
- That's quite true, but ...
- Maybe you are right, but ...
- I have to disagree with you there...
- I couldn't agree with you less.

3. Giving examples:

For example	In addition to	In fact
For instance	A case in point	Specifically
Further more	That is	Especially

4. Summarizing or conclusion:

All in all, in conclusion, in other words, in short, in summary, on the whole, therefore, to sum up, generally speaking, in general, after all,

5. Describing feelings:

- happy, cheerful, funny, eager, impressed, excited
- nervous, nervy, worried, tired, bored, frightened, afraid, regretful, awful ...

6. Subjunctive structures:

- I wish I ...
- If only I ...
- If I were you, or something like that, I would ...
- I know that if I ... , I ...
- I'd like to ...
- I should (not) have done ...
- Do you mind if (I) ...
- Would you mind if (I)...

III. Conclusion

In general, this Practical Test-Oriented Speaking Task has been wholly initiated and designed to meet the needs of the reality in teaching and learning English speaking skill for second-year students at in FETE, ULIS. This set of activities possesses many beneficial things for both students and teachers as follow.

III.1. Benefits for students

- Students have more time and opportunities to practice the target language items required in each module as well as improve their language performance.
- Students' individual creativeness, independence, cooperation in thinking, working and practice is promoted.

- Students are clearly aware of and recognize their specific and individual language mistakes or errors.
- The practice set of activities highly motivates students' responsibility and enhances their potential ability of self or inter-correcting language mistakes.
- This series of tasks can be an available source of practice activities and language reference which make it ready for students at the final oral exams.
- Accordingly, students' skill to fulfill oral test tasks is improved.

III.2. Advantages for teachers

- This set is relevant and appropriate in designing various speaking practice activities.
- Teachers can make use of as many target language items in each language unit as possible (practicing areas of *pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar points, expressions etc.*)
- Teachers have more time and opportunities to correct specific and individual language mistakes or errors.
- The speaking tasks suggest a clear guidance for appropriate continuous assessment criteria and testing areas at the final oral test.
- This can be an available source for test bank tasks and activities.

III.3. Suggestion for further study

An attempt has been made to design a practical set of speaking tasks for students to practice the English language at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels within restriction scale of application. Further studies, if possible, would be the followings:

- Such practical speaking activities will be designed for students at lower or higher levels to practice (elementary or advanced levels, for instance).
- This can be employed as course continuous assessment tasks rather than mere practicing speaking activities within a larger amount of students.
- A more detailed investigation into students and teachers' feedback after applying this series of speaking tasks at a larger scale.