

This, however, necessitates a high degree of exposure to different registers which is not always possible.

The second area suggested for testing is fluency. Fluency is primarily considered as the natural and unrestrained flow of sentences. Students learning a foreign language vary in their fluent oral expressions. Fluency indicates the student's confidence, his wealth of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, his command of sentence structure, and his familiarity with different registers. Speed is certainly one component of fluency which indicates not only confidence but also command of, and familiarity with the spoken language. Moreover, the correct use of various link words helps the natural flow and speed of the student's oral production.

Iraqi students tend to use bookish rather than everyday words in their speech.² Expressions of the spoken language should replace those used in the written one. The instructor would look for those words and expressions of the spoken language in the student's oral production. Also sentence pattern used by the student is of importance. For example, the instructor may expect short or incomplete sentences when the student is narrating an event, and long ones when he is talking about a more weighty subject.

Correctness is another important component of the student's spoken language. It is the correctness of the spoken rather than the written language. Hence the instructor should look for acceptable grammatical usage and patterns as found in ordinary, everyday speech. And since such speech is not always grammatically correct, what is acceptable then is what is comprehensible. This, however, does not mean that major grammatical mistakes are to be allowed. For example, tense, agreement of subject and verb, the use of prepositions, articles, and relative pronouns are indications of the student's command of the spoken language. In addition, the speedy choice of words that are semantically exact, the appropriateness of register, the intelligible pronunciation of words, and the right intonation and stress in the sentence pattern all form part of correctness.

As to pronunciation the criterion should be comprehensibility. If the instructor understands what the student is saying, then his pronunciation is acceptable. To include a native speaker in the examining committee is useful in determining the degree of comprehensibility. Moreover, the student's pronunciation may be chosen from a range of accents, but it should be free from incongruity, ambiguity, and artificiality. However, to insist that the foreign student's pronunciation should be RP, or it should echo exactly an RP pronunciation that may be called «standard» or «educated», is unrealistic. Such insistence would encourage artificiality at the expense of spontaneous, natural and comprehensible pronunciation. Another important element of intelligible pronunciation is the use of natural pauses of ordinary speech. Even more important for intelligible pronunciation is the production of (a) consonant contrasts, (b) vowel contrasts (used in isolation or in a chosen context), (c) consonant clusters, and (d) rhymes (recognition and distinction of rhyming words). Here correct pronunciation is vital to avoid ambiguity.

Finally, the examining committee should keep in mind that the most satisfactory response can be obtained from the student if the test takes place in a cordial, relaxed atmosphere, and the student is made to feel at ease. Similarly, the time allotted to each student should be reasonable to allow the instructor to evaluate the student's performance as accurately as possible.

2. There are certain reasons for this tendency. Among these is the method used in teaching English to Iraqi pupils when they are beginning to learn the language. Another is the influence of the formal native language used in schools or in mass media.

GUIELINES FOR TESTING OF ENGLISH COVERSAATION

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These guidelines are intended to assist instructors teaching conversation to Iraqi students. They are related to the understanding and production of the language of ordinary speech rather than to theoretical phonetics, although some aspects of practical phonetics form parts of the testing. The areas suggested for testing are as follows:

- a. Comprehension
- b. Fluency
- c. Correctness
- d. Pronunciation

Although these areas of language skills are interrelated, it is advisable that a committee of instructors conduct the test. Each instructor should give his own assessment of the student's performance in each particular area of the test. Yet while each area is given a separate grade, the aim of the test should be to evaluate the student's aural-oral competence in its totality.

In comprehension, the instructor should look for the student's ability to understand what is being said, whether it is a question asked, a recorded conversation or some other taped material used for this purpose. The degree of relevance of the student's response to spoken language should determine the degree of comprehension⁽¹⁾.

Needless to say, the subject and accent chosen for testing should be within the student's social, cultural and linguistic experience. And since the areas of language skills mentioned above are interrelated, the instructor should pay attention not only to comprehension but to the other areas as well.

Comprehension is also linked with intonation and stress. These appear in the student's response to the spoken language. The following examples may illustrate the point :

Did *Ali* break the window? No, *Ahmed* did.

Did *Ali* break the window? No, it was only *scratched*.

Did *Ali* break the *window*? No, he broke the *vase*.

Layla is here. Oh, I see. falling
intonation

Layla is here. Yes, she is. rising
intonation

The student is expected to recognize the relation between stress, intonation, and meaning. It should appear in both reception and production.

Likewise, the tone used, whether emotional or restrained, should be suitable to subject matter, thus giving an indication of comprehension and production. Talking about romantic poetry for example, requires a different tone from that used for motor cycling.

(1) In those cases where the instructor is certain that the student has understood what he heard, but unable to give a satisfactory response, the assessment should be based more on production than on comprehension, because there can be no intelligible conversation without meaningful response.