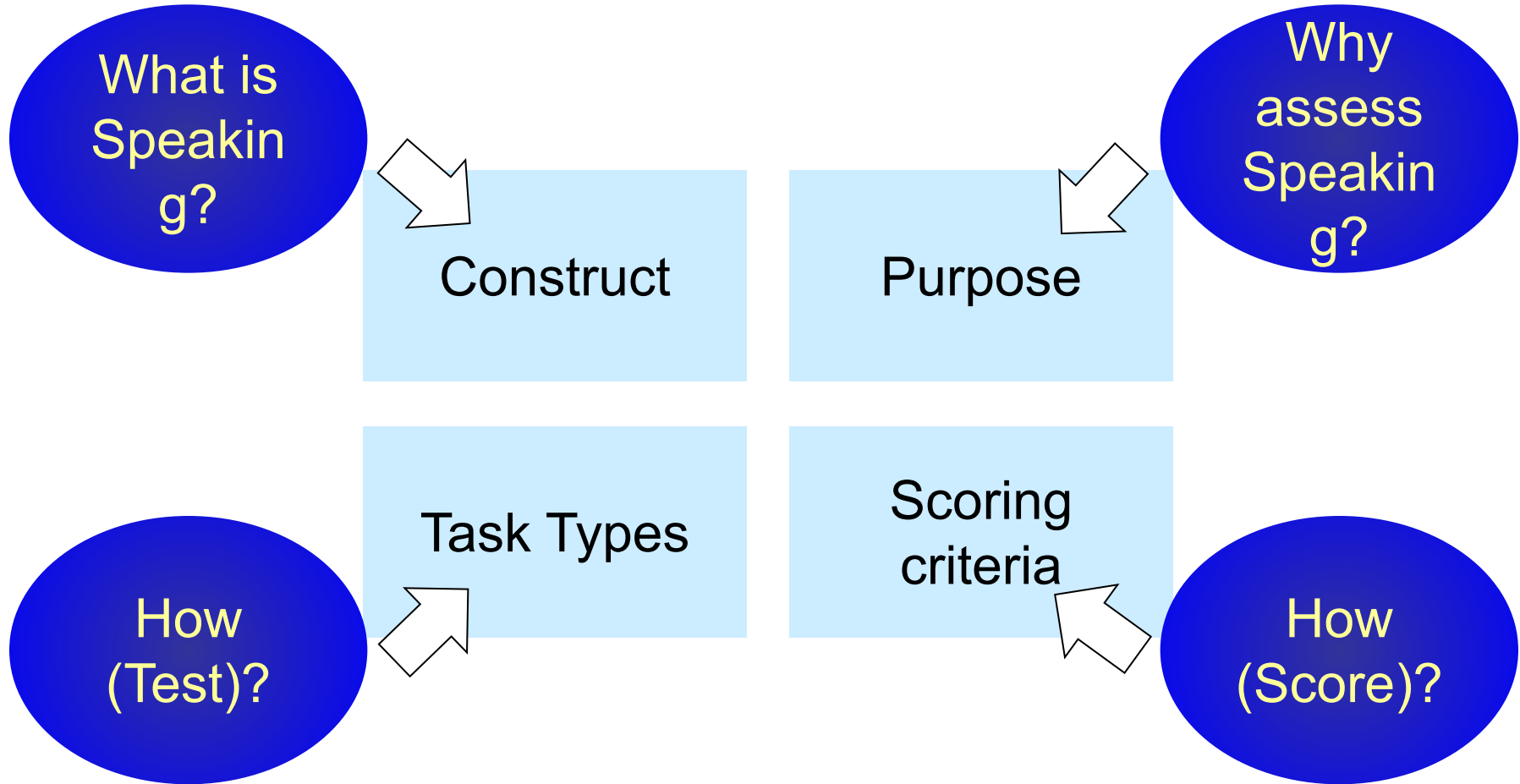


# Assessing Speaking

# Outline

- Key questions
- Nature of speaking
- Speaking as a skill
- Test purposes and different test types
- Speaking test tasks (advantages and disadvantages)
- Washback effect

# Key questions



# Nature of Speaking

- Spoken language
- Speaking as interaction
- Speaking as a social activity
- Speaking as a situation-based activity

# What is Speaking?

A part of the shared social activity of talking  
(Luoma, 2004: 29)

In comparison with writing, ...

**Less**

- Planned
- Complex
- Formal
- Lexically dense

- Transient
- Dynamic
- Interpersonal
- Content dependant

# Speaking vs Writing

The main differences are in Processing –  
time is crucial

- Reciprocity взаимность is the solution (

# Spoken language

- Pronunciation
- Spoken grammar
- Lexis

# Pronunciation

- Speech is judged on the basis of pronunciation.
- What is standard? – Native speaker vs non-native speaker.
- Communicative effectiveness, which is based on comprehensibility and probably guided by native speaker standards but defined in terms of realistic learner achievement, is a better standard for learner pronunciation. (Luoma S., 2004)
- What to include into assessment of pronunciation?

Pronunciation – individual sounds, pitch, volume, speed, pausing, stress and intonation



# Spoken Grammar

- Grammar is easy to judge because it is easy to detect in speech and writing.
- Speakers do not usually speak in sentences.
- Speech consists of idea units connected with *and, or, but, or that*
- Planned vs unplanned speech – complex structures vs short idea units
- The internal structure of idea units - *topicalisation* and *tails* create an impression of naturalness

# Features of Spoken Lexis

- ‘Simple’ and ‘ordinary’ words are common in normal spoken discourse and mark a highly advanced level of speaking skills. (Luoma S., 2004)
- Generic words (important for the naturalness of talk)
- Vague words
- Fixed conventional phrases
- Smallwords (the more – the better perceived fluency)

# Slips and errors

Normal speech contains a fair number of slips and errors such as mispronounced words, mixed sounds, and wrong words due to inattention (Luoma S., 2004).

# Speaking as a skill

- Task fulfillment/content
- Fluency
- Accuracy
- Vocabulary and grammar range
- Interaction

# Speaking as meaningful interaction

- Speaking is both personal and a part of the shared social activity of talking.
- The openness of meanings is not only a convenience in speech; it is also an effective strategy for speakers. (Luoma S., 2004)
- Chatting vs information-related talk
- The role of speaking situations
- Roles, role relationships and politeness

# What do we need to decide before giving a speaking test?

- What **aspects of language** we want to assess
- How to **elicit ratable language samples** from test-takers suitable for the aspects of language

We need to decide;

- **Rating criteria** [marking categories, levels, descriptors] [Holistic scales vs. Analytical scales]
- **Elicitation techniques / Test format** (types of questions, task types)

# Test purposes and different test types

## **Test Purposes**

- Proficiency tests
- Achievement tests
- Placement tests
- Diagnostic tests

# Low stakes vs high-stakes tests

## **Direct vs Indirect testing**

- Direct Testing
- Indirect Testing

## **NR vs CR testing**

- Norm-referenced testing
- Criterion-referenced testing



# Direct vs Indirect testing

- **Direct testing:** “requires the candidate to perform precisely the skill that we wish to measure”
- **Indirect testing:** “attempts to measure the abilities that underlie the skill in which we are interested”

(Hughes, 2003: 17-19)

# NR vs CR testing

- **Norm-referenced testing:** “An individual performance is evaluated against the range of performances typical of a population of similar individuals”
- **Criterion-referenced testing:** “Individual performances are evaluated against a verbal description of a satisfactory performance at a given level.”

(McNamara, 2000: 62-64, 135)

# Speaking tasks

- A communicative task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form... (Nunan)
- Speaking tasks can be seen as activities that involve speakers in using language for the purpose of achieving a particular goal or objective in a particular speaking situation (Bachman and Palmer)

# Features of a speaking task

- Input, or material used in the task
- Roles of the participants
- Settings, or classroom arrangements fro paired or group work
- Actions, or what is to happen in the task
- Monitoring, or who is to select input, choose role or setting, alter actions
- Outcomes as the goal of the task
- Feedback given as evaluation to participants
  - Candlin (1987) from G. Fulcher (2003)

# Speaking test tasks

- Individual
- Paired
- Group

# Speaking test tasks

- **Oral Presentation** (Verbal Essay, Prepared monologue)
- **Information Transfer** (Description of Picture Sequence, Questions on a single Picture, Alternative Visual Stimuli)
- **Interaction Tasks** (Information Gap: Student – Student, Student – Examiner, Open Role Play, Guided Role Play)
- **Interview** (Free, Structured)
- **Discussion** (Student-Student, Student-Examiner)

# Framework for designing test tasks

- **Operations (activities/skills)**

Informational routines (e.g. telling a story) and improvisational skills (negotiation of meaning and management of interaction)

- **Conditions** under which the tasks are performed (e.g. time constraints, the number of people involved and familiarity with each other)

- **Quality of output**, the expected level of performance in terms of various relevant criteria, e.g. accuracy, fluency or intelligibility.

(C. Weir, 1993: 30)

# Developing criteria for assessment speaking

- The importance of double marking for reducing unreliability is undeniable.
- These criteria need to reflect the features of spoken language interaction the test task is designed to generate.
- The criteria used would depend on the nature of the skills being tested and the level of detail desired by the end users. The crucial question would be what the tester wants to find out about a student's performance on appropriate spoken interaction tasks.

(C. Weir, 1993: 30)

# Scoring

- Holistic scale  
e.g. Trinity College  
Bands A, B, C, D

- Analytic scale  
e.g. IELTS  
Fluency and coherence  
Lexical resources  
Grammatical range and  
accuracy  
pronunciation



# Washback effect

Positive / negative washback

- the role of an interviewer  
(interrater / intrarater reliability)