Innovations in EAP oral assessment: the IOA project

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Overview

• Current state of oral language assessment
• Technology in oral language assessment
• The Interactive Oral Assessment project
• Research methodology
• Key findings
• Conclusion and implications
• Questions and suggestions
Current state of oral language assessment

- Ability to speak a language (Luoma 2004)
  - Interaction with someone
  - Social activity
  - Situation-based
- Speaking: tasks
  - Communicative functions
  - Individual presentations, pair and group
Technology in oral language assessment

- Increasing use of computer technology in language tests (e.g., see Chapelle & Douglas 2006); esp. commercial tests (e.g., TOEFL iBT™); DIALANG

- Use of technology for oral assessment – limited interaction (e.g., recorded presentation, current practices in DoL)

- Ongoing debate: human versus machine scoring (Xi 2010)

- Flexibility?
The Interactive Oral Assessment (IOA) project

Purpose:

• To explore the possibility of using Talkback® for formative and summative assessment of listening and speaking skills
The project

• 2 strands
  - 60 L192 (French Beginners) students
  - 11 L185 (EAP) students

• Timing:
  6 weeks in October/December 2010

• Project components
  – 5 units on Talkback®
  – 2 TMAs
  – Module workspace including module guides, overview of activities, link to the Learnosity website hosting the online review and feedback and a forum common to both strands.
Welcome to the Open University. Enter your student ID. Enter your Pin ... Please enter a 3 digit activity code or press 0 to review past activity.

Talkback: On the phone/ Skype

Audio questions → Recorded answers

Playback of questions, student’s answers and sample answers
Talkback: Online
EAP task types

- Giving information
- Speculating and analysing
- Constructing coherent mini academic presentations
- Summarizing information
- Communicative functions required for academic study
- Listening and responding to situations (e.g., seminars)
- Discussing and justifying ideas
- Listening and responding to prompts
- Expressing and responding to opinions
Data collection

- Online weekly surveys (modes of access, functionality, context, activities, TMAs, feedback on TMAs)
- Interviews with selected participants (March 2011)
- Forum (tutors and students)
- Talkback feedback question
Number of participants responding to the questionnaire for each phase of the L185 branch of the Interactive oral assessment project
Student preferences (in order of preference)

EAP students: Skype and a landline

The perception of being 'live'.

Talkback allow to listen, to record, to review or to rerecord activities in very easy way. It also allow to do activities anywhere and in any time (access to the computer is not necessary) …
Usefulness of providing speaking activities via Talkback® (EAP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely useful</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very useful</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very useful</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not useful at all</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall experience of doing TMAs via Talkback® (EAP)

![Bar chart showing the number of responses for Very good, Good, Not very good, and Not very good at all phases.]

- **Phase 3**
  - Very good: 3
  - Good: 4
  - Not very good: 0
  - Not very good at all: 0

- **Phase 5**
  - Very good: 4
  - Good: 3
  - Not very good: 0
  - Not very good at all: 1
Reasons for participation (EAP)

- To improve pronunciation: 8
- To improve academic discussion skills: 7
- To practise academic presentation skills: 7
- To practise listening skills: 5
- Other, please specify: 4
Perceptions of students at the end of IOA (EAP)

Perceived improvement in:

- Listening skills: 4
- Respond quickly orally: 5
- Respond more appropriately orally: 5
- Confidence: 6
- Academic discussion skills: 4
- Academic presentation skills: 5
- Motivation: 3
- Other: 4

Total: 16
Conclusion and implications

• Talkback provides a more realistic oral assessment context than other tools such as CDs or even computer adaptive tests
• It can be used for both practice and assessment
• Potentially more cost effective than face-to-face and yet authentic
• ‘Instant feedback’ to students: general & personalised
• Provides flexibility to students regarding which tools to use (e.g., phone, skype, etc.) and where and when to do activities
• For maximum effectiveness, Talkback® needs to be integrated into a module
• Talkback® can be integrated into non-language modules but may require ‘field testing’
'I have grown in skills, fluency and confidence (...) Thank you.'

‘Doing TMA via Talkback is less stressful, easier, it save time and avoid complication, for example submitting TMA in incorrect file.’
Any questions or suggestions?
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References

