Classroom-based Assessment of Oral Mediation: Challenges and Opportunities

Olga Lankina, Yulia Petz

St Petersburg State University, Russia

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ABSTRACT

The presentation examines the classroom-based assessment of oral mediation (mediating texts and concepts by means of one language, English).

The empirical research underlying the presentation features undergraduate students of management and engineering departments (91 people, B1 – B2 CEFR). The procedure of the oral test involves written or video input, preparation, group discussion and self/peer assessment. Marks awarded by professional raters are mapped onto peer and self-assessment. The instruments that are being used include classroom observation, results analysis with classical methods of statistics (ITEMAN) and the many-facet Rasch model (FACETS).

CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVE

Collaboration in the workplace is becoming increasingly important, especially in management and engineering. *Mediating concepts, collaborating in a group and leading group work* are professional tasks of a manager or an engineer, which gives group discussion a prominent role in teaching ESP. This brings up a question as to how to assess group discussions.

The objective of this presentation is to show that *mediation can be effectively used for formative and summative assessment of group discussion*. We also suggest that assessment of group discussion should be done by giving candidates *Global Achievement marks for mediation and Analytical marks*.

CEFR Descriptors: Backward Design
Facilitating collaborative interaction is described by CV CEFR mediation descriptors, which helps understand what skills we want our learners to acquire in order to be effective communicators.

TEST

Three Speaking tests were used in measuring oral performance in group discussions at B1 and B2 CEFR.

Test tasks focus on each student's *ability to discuss a topic collaborating in a group (oral mediation)* and an *ability to produce a range of accurate grammar and lexis; pronunciation; discourse management and interaction.*.

Peer and self-assessment were aimed at raising self-awareness of students and developing their learner autonomy. The research showed that peer and self-assessment show low correlation (Pt.Biserial: 0.57; 0.40/Pt.Exp: 0.61; 0.60); and formative and summative tests should be assessed by professional raters.
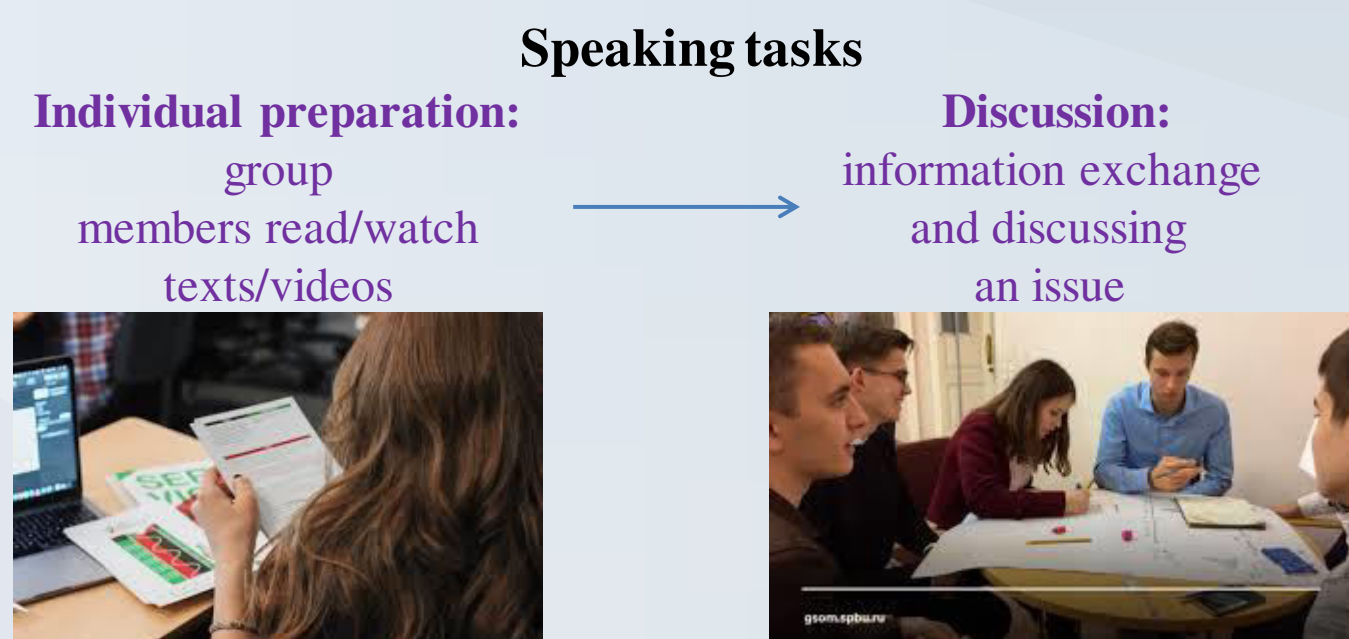
TEST (cont.)

Speaking tasks

Individual preparation:		Discussion:
group members read/watch texts/videos	→	information exchange and discussing an issue

Table 1. Tasks details

Format	Procedure	Task focus
B1 CEFR, 3-4 students; 12-15 min	Each student is given a written stimulus, a unique option, and a task, then asked to present their options and discuss an issue.	Mediating information of a factual and general kind, e.g. options for charity or education. Using functional language to discuss options, inviting to speak, asking straightforward questions, giving reasons for views, repeating back to confirm mutual understanding, defining the task, collaborating on a shared task, maintaining the focus of a discussion.
B2 CEFR 6-7 students; 25-29 min	Students are divided into two mini-groups. Each mini-group watches a video, different from the video of another group; then students are asked to discuss an issue using videos as a stimulus.	Mediating information of a factual, general and abstract nature, e.g. leadership styles. Using functional language to further develop other people's ideas and opinions, present ideas and invite reactions, consider different sides of an issue; organize a discussion, refocus it, highlight the main issue, collaborate in decision-making.

TEST MARKING

Student responses are marked by trained examiners using assessment scales linked to the CEFR.

The CEFR (2001) and CV CEFR (2018) descriptors are used to write 5-point analytical and global achievement scales for bands 1, 3 and 5. Students' performance is reported in terms of 1-5 marks where "1" is the lowest and "5" is the highest mark.

Five analytical criteria are: (1) interaction, (2) discourse management, (3) range, (4) accuracy and (5) phonological control.

Global achievement mark for mediation: while discussing students reformulate, summarize or streamline information. At the same time they try to build a rapport within the discussion group. That is why to assess mediation globally the assessor has to ask two questions:

1) has the student managed to convey information clearly?	2) has the student facilitated the discussion and collaborated successfully to construct meaning?

The answers to these questions help the assessor to decide what the global achievement mark for mediation is.

Hence, the global achievement mark for mediation evaluates *(1) relaying information and (2) facilitating discussions and collaborating to construct meaning*.

There is no interlocutor; the teacher acts as the assessor. During the discussion, the assessor awards analytical marks to every student. After the discussion, the assessor gives students global achievement marks for mediation. The discussion is recorded and assessed by another teacher. There is a possibility for more rounds of assessment.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows B1 and B2 populations (43 and 48 students) who took three Speaking tests. Students' proficiency level can be described as average (Item Mean/Score Average: 3,48-3,92). Assessors Pt-Biserial correlation lies in the interval (0,75; 0,84).

Table 2. Summary Statistics (ITEMAN – orange; FACETS - green)

Level	Topic	N of Students	Score Mean	SD*	Min Score	Max Score	Item Mean*	Mean R*	Alpha*	SEM*	Mean Rater Correlation PtMeasure	Item Mean (Item Observed)	Mean Resd*	Mean StRes*	Mean S.D.
Test 1 B1	Charity	22	20,909	4,734	13	30	3,485	0,863	0,951	1,044	0,81	3,48	0,00	0,02	1,02
Test 2 B1	Education	21	23,000	5,089	11	30	3,833	0,860	0,952	1,113	0,75	3,83	0,00	0,00	1,00
Test 3 B2	Leadership	48	23,500	3,627	18	30	3,917	0,794	0,925	0,992	0,84	3,92	0,00	-0,01	0,99

* ITEMAN: SD = standard deviation; Item Mean = average of the criterion marks; Mean R = average item-total correlation for that portion of the test ; Alpha = KR 20; SEM = standard error of measurement
* FACETS: Mean Rater Correlation PtMeasure = average of the Point-Measure correlation; Resed = Residuals; S.D. = sample standard deviation (When the parameters are successfully estimated, the mean Resd is 0.0.); Mean StRes (When the data fit the Rasch model, the mean of the "StRes" (Standardized Residuals) is expected to be near 0.0, and the "S.D." (sample standard deviation) is expected to be near 1.0.)
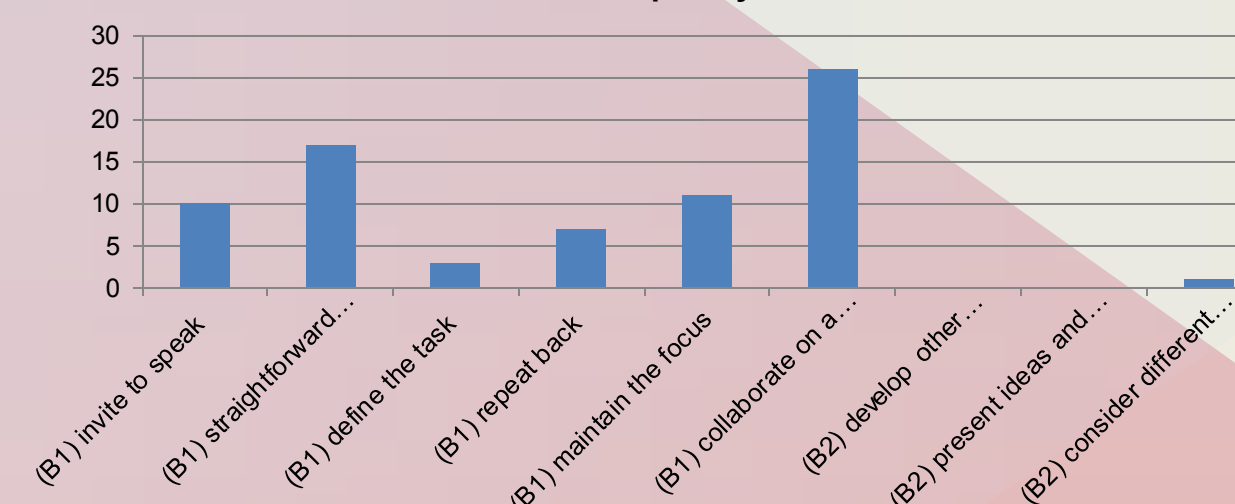
Challenges for students

1) The biggest challenge is *developing other people's ideas*. Instead of discussing an issue, students at lower levels get by with presenting their views one by one. Collaboration is quite rudimentary and short. The rates of long turn (red) to collaboration (blue) phases at B1 low and B1 average levels constitute 0,8 and 0,66 respectively.

The rates of long turn and collaboration phases
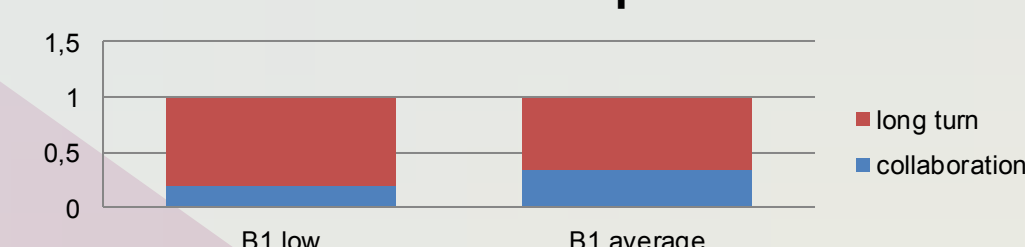
2) Another challenge is using a range of descriptors. At lower levels the most frequently used descriptors are: "collaborate on a shared task", "ask straightforward questions", "maintain the focus" and "invite to speak".


B1 Low. Frequency of Use

3) Group format and the absence of interlocutor can cause a problem for shy students; however, these factors never considerably affected students within the current research.

Challenges for assessors
The criteria correlations (PtMea, FACETS) lie in the interval of (0,77; 0,9) with a larger discrepancy for mediation and interaction. A reason for this could be an overlapping nature of "interaction" and "mediation".


Correlation PtMea
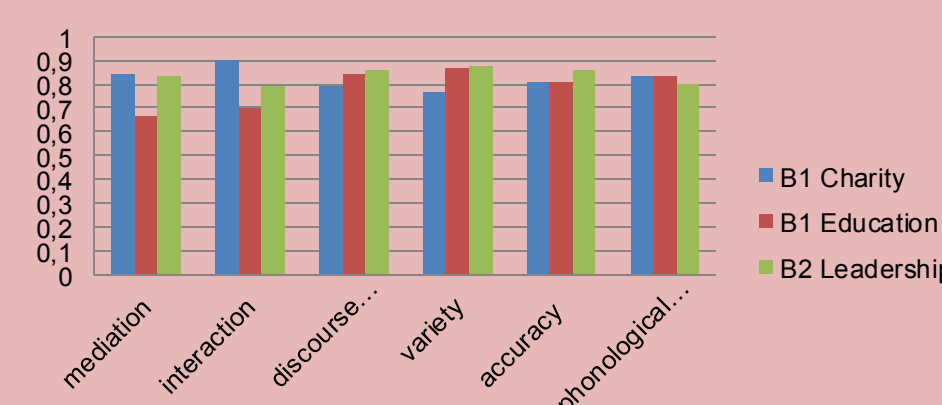
RESULTS (cont.)

Opportunities

1) Group format and the absence of interlocutor create an authentic situation.

Within this method assessors can use some useful tips:

2) Good discussants tend to pack their speech with descriptors. The figures below show the frequency of mediation descriptors used by group members. Groups are arranged by their mean score; successful groups are on the left. The higher the mean score is, the more descriptors are used.

B1 Test 'Charity' | B1 Test 'Education' | B2 Test 'Leadership'
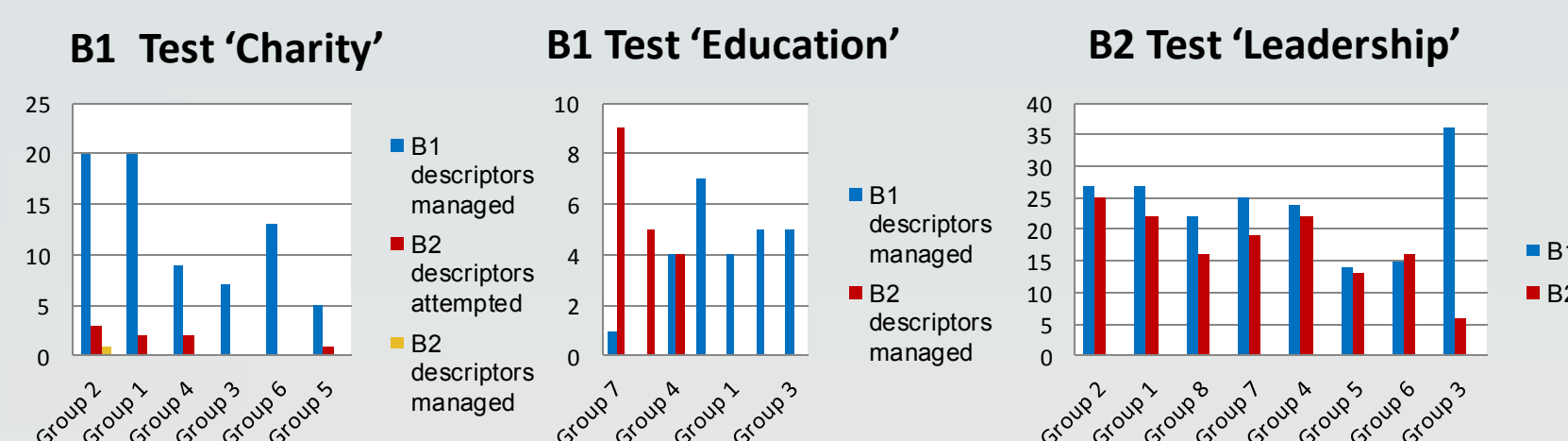
2) The other CEFR-related factors that indicate the quality of a discussion are
• level of descriptors used (Are there more B1, B2 or C1 descriptors?)
• range of descriptors (Are there a few descriptors overused or the range of descriptors is wide?)
• involvement (Are there many active participants in the group or a few?)

3) Assessors self-check their analytical marks by giving the Global Achievement marks for mediation.
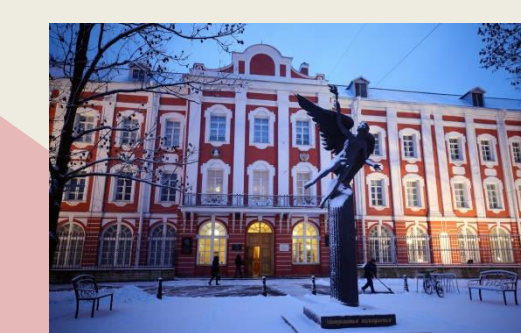
CONCLUSIONS

Teaching: The main implication of shifting from teaching communication to teaching mediation is the *increased focus on the collaborative development of new ideas*.

Assessment: The concept of mediation helps to understand the nature of group discussion and define accurately the criteria for its assessment.

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Software *ITEMAN* http://www.assess.com/iteman/ ; FACETS https://www.winsteps.com/minifac.htm
FACETS User Manual, https://www.winsteps.com/facetman/index.htm

CONTACTS

Olga Lankina: ESP teacher, speaking examiner and examiner trainer, a member of EALTA. E-mail: olga_lankina@mail.ru
Yulia Petz: teacher of English for academic purposes, speaking examiner, a member of EALTA. e-mail: j_u_lia@mail.ru