# "Speaking", "Speech Act Theory" and "Testing of Speaking" How they Interrelate

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## 1. Introduction

The author has been planning to construct a speaking test which is valid, reliable and practical especially focusing on the current linguistic theory of communicative competence. In order to construct a speaking test, the first thing we should do is to clarify the concept of "speaking" (speaking ability). Without the established concept of "speaking", the validity of a speaking test will not be able to be determined.

Although "speaking" must be composed of diversified aspects of language components, there are some indispensable aspects for constructing the concept of "speaking." Considering the natural function of speaking, we can assume that one of the most important aspects of "speaking" must be the speaker-hearer interaction along with the speaker's intension, which is partly derived from Speech Act Theory currently employed in the communicative language competence. Thus, we will be involved in *"Speaking"*, *Speech Act Theory*, and *Testing of Speaking*.

## 2. Purpose of the Paper

This paper examines "Speaking" (or Speaking Ability) in terms of Speech Act Theory, and investigates the relevance of Illocutionary Competence (as representative of Speech Acts) as a testing category in the author's proposed speaking test. For this purpose this paper will consist of the following seven sections plus a conclusion :

1) Necessity of Constructing a Speaking Test
2) Important Factors for the Components of "Speaking" from Linguistic Theories
3) Bachman's (1990) Theoretical Framework of Communicative Language Ability
4) Proposed Testing Criteria of "Speaking" with Special Reference to Illocutionary Competence
5) Overview of Speech Act Theory
6) Relation between Speech Act Theory and "Speaking"
7) Possible Profits and Problems of Using Speech Acts in Testing of Speaking

8) Conclusion

## 3. Necessity of Constructing a Speaking Test

The recent Gakushu-shido-yoryo (Course of Study for Lower and Upper Secondary Schools in Japan) (Mombusho 1988) has been revised and it will focus more on having students master communication ability (speaking and listening) in junior and senior highschools in Japan.

In colleges, students have also been asking for the relevant courses for mastering oral communication ability (or speaking ability) according to the result of the JACET study group (1989).

Although many teachers at colleges, who are seriously thinking of the students' needs, have been trying to find solutions in textbooks, teaching methods, audio-visual aids etc., few of them want to deal with testing of oral/aural communication ability (especially speaking ability). In language teaching, testing can not be thought little of or should never be forgotten because of its backwash effects, grading, teaching effects, thinking of the concept of a test etc.. In order to test "speaking ability", constructing the concept of speaking ability is indispensable from the viewpoint of validity of tests. Thus, the next section will survey the theoretical ideas which are related to the concept of speaking ability from the viewpoint of language function.

## 4. Important Factors for the Components of "Speaking" from Linguistic Theories

Halliday (1978) and Halliday-Hasan (1976) describe three major functional-semantic components: 1) the ideational component, which is part of the linguistic system, 2) the interpersonal component, which is concerned with the social, expressive and conative functions of language, and 3) the textual component, which is the text-forming component in the linguistic system. Components 2) and 3) (interpersonal and textual) are stressed more than the ideational component (which has been exclusively focused on in linguistic theory so far). The interpersonal component is, especially, a necessary condition for the speaking ability.

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Canale and Swain (1980) and Swain (1985) expanded the notions of communicative competence and introduced four areas of communicative competence: 1) grammatical competence, 2) sociolinguistic competnece, 3) discourse competence and 4) strategic competence.

In the sociolinguistic competence they refer to the appropriateness of utterance and knowledge of speech acts (cf. Scarcella et al 1990). Clearly, the idea of appropriateness and speech acts is well evaluated.

Levelt (1990) states that speaking is a complex skill and that the most primordial and universal part of speech is conversational, free interaction between two or more interlocuters. He points out three characters of con-versation (speaking): 1) interactional element, 2) spatio-temporal element, and 3) intentional element. Among these three characters, interactional and intentional elements are especially concentrated on because of their tight connection with speaking.

Furthermore, Richards (1980) deals with conversation as a system of verbal communication and analyses communication from the viewpoint of speech acts. He claims that speech acts can be described as the things we actually do when we speak. He explains that a speech act can be defined as the minimal unit of speaking which can be said to have a function and evaluates the idea of speech acts well.

These four theoretical ideas mentioned above suggest that the notions of *interaction*, *intention*, *cmmmunication* and conver*sation* (all of which involve *speech acts*) are unavoidable to think about "speaking".

Thus, we will observe a theoretical framework, which can cover all of these sepeaking factors mentioned above, in the next section.

## 5. Bachman's (1990) Theoretical Framework of Communicative Language Ability

Bachman's (1990) Communicative Language Aability seems to include almost all of the important language factors (for constructing the concept of speaking) which were raised by the above mentioned scholars such as Halliday, Canale and Swain. The author used Bachman's theory as a theoretical framework for the author's proposed speaking test (which will

be later shown in the following section).   Here let us look at Bachman's framework.

Bachman (1990) views second language competence as consisting of two main components: organizational and pragmatic. Organizational competence consists of grammatical competence (which includes lexis, morphology, syntax and phonology/graphology) and textual competence (which includes cohesion and rhetorical organization).

Pragmatic competence, which is a new perspective in Bachman's framework (Fouly et al 1990), includes illocutionary and sociolinguistic components.   Bachman's conception of illocutionary competence is derived from the theory of speech acts (Austin 1962: Searle 1969) and Halliday's (1973, 1976) description of language functions. However, the illocutionary competence in the framework indicates the knowledge of how to perform language functions (but not using the specific term from the speech acts). The sub-divisions of the illocutionary competence, thus, include four major functions as follows:

1)   the ideational function: the use of language to express meaning in terms of one's experience of the real world

2)   the manipulative function: the use of language to affect the world around oneself

3)   the heuristic function: the use of language in extending one's knowledge of the world

4)   the imaginative function: the use of language to create an environment through creative language use,   as in literature and humor

Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use the second language appropriately in a particular culture and in varying contexts or situations in that culture.

The other components (strategic competence and psychophysiological mechanism) in Communicative Language Ability will not be dealt with in this paper.   The following section will mainly focus on Illocutionary Competence as a testing category in a proposed speaking test.

## 6. Proposed Testing Criteria of Speaking (primarily derived from Bachman's theoretical framework) with Special Reference to Ilocutionary Competence

The author has been trying to construct testing criteria (or categories) of a speaking test (see Appendix) by taking into consideration Bachman's (1990) theoretical framework. There are 11 main categories 1) Grammatical accuracy, 2) Vocabulary use, 3) Pronunciation (segmental features), 4) Pronunciation (suprasegmental features), 5) Fluency, 6) Discourse (cohesion and coherence factors), 7) Content, 8) Level of speaker's confidence, 9) Sociolinguistic competence, 10) Strategic competence, and 11) Illocutionary competence) with 48 sub-categories. Among the 11 main categories, the illocutionary competence, which must be the central idea of speech acts, and is originally derived from Bachman's framework, does not include the four language functions raised by Bachman, but rather includes three new sub-categories (utterance act, propositional act and illocutionary act) derived from Searle (1975). In order to represent Speech Acts, the illocutionary competence with these three sub-categories seems to be more relevant.

The main focus will move on to Speech Acts in general, and to the illocutionary competence or to the illocutionary act. "Speaking" and the relevance of the illocutionary competence in testing speaking will also be discussed in the following section.

## 7. Overview of Speech Act Theory

In this section we will look at Speech Act Theory by focusing on main constituents: 1) Speech Acts 2) Illocutionary acts and Illocutionary force 3) Cooperative Principle and Polite Principle.

The speech act theory has attempted to analyse what speakers do with words and how people relate words to the world. Psychologists have suggested that the acquisition of language in general (e. g. Bruner 1975: Bates 1976). The speech act theory can help formulate models of how to deal with subjective phenomenon such as a speaker's intentions and a hearer's sharable assumptions about the world. It also suggests that language use is governed by a system of public rules and criteria capabale

of being stated (Dimitracopoulou 1990).

## 7. 1.   Speech Acts

Speech acts can be described as the things we actually do when we speak.   When we engage in conversation we perform such acts as giving, reporting, making statements, warning, promising, approving, suggesting, criticizing, requesting and so on.   And a speech act can be defined as the minimal unit of speaking which can be said to have a function (Richards 1980).

J. L. Austin (1962), after raising and rejecting the dichotomy between performatives and constatives, distinguished three kinds of acts (speech acts) that are performed simultaneously :

1)   Locutionary act : the utterance of a sentence with determinate sense and reference

2)   Illocutionary act : the making of a statement, an offer, a promise, etc. by virtue of the conventional force associated with the sentence

3)   Perlocutionary act : the bringing-about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence, such effects being special to the circumstances of utterance

John Searle (1969) made a little different division of speech acts by classifying them into the following categories :

1)   utterance act

2)   propositional act

   (1)   act of referring

   (2)   act of predicating

   (3)   illocutionary act

Although there are some differences between the two scholars' definitions of speech acts, both of them pointed out the importance of "illocutionary act", and indeed the term "speech act" has come to refer exclusively to this illocutionary act.

## 7. 2.   Illocutionary act and Illocutionary force

It is generally assumed that speakers produce utterances in order to realize certain communicative intentions.   This communicative intention is

can have some intention to speak even in the testing situations.


# APPENDIX

Part I.

Directions:

When you evaluate Japanese students' English speaking ability in class,

how much weight do you put on each category below ?

Please circle one choice for each category. See the example below.

|  | not important | | | important | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| EXAMPLE | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Grammatical accuracy | | | | ① | |
| Vocabulary use | | ① | | | |
| Pronunciation (segmental features) | | | | | ① |

N. B.   If you are not sure of the definition of the eleven categories below, please refer to the following pages where you can find some specific items in each category.

|  | not important | | | important | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1.   Grammatical accuracy | | | | | |
| 2.   Vocabulary use | | | | | |
| 3.   Pronunciation (segmental features) | | | | | |
| 4.   Pronunciation (suprasegmental features) | | | | | |
| 5.   Fluency | | | | | |
| 6.   Discourse (cohesion and coherence) factors | | | | | |
| 7.   Content | | | | | |
| 8.   Level of speaker's confidence | | | | | |
| 9.   Sociolinguistic cmpetence | | | | | |
| 10.   Strategic competence | | | | | |
| 11.   Illocutionary competence | | | | | |

There are some types of speech act that are unknown to one's own culture. They may even involve other classes of illocutionary force (Levelt 1990). Consequently, there is a need to take into account two aspects of illocutionary force (the common area which is universal among cultures and the peripheral area which varies from culture to culture).

**7. 3** Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle

We must also look at Speech Acts from the viewpoint of "interaction." Unlike the pure linguistic theory which is strict about *rules, grammaticality* and *forms*, the speech act theory rather focuses on *principles* contrasted with *rules, appropriateness* contrasted with *grammaticality* and *fuuctions* contrasted with *forms* (Yamanashi 1986). The speech act deals with the appropriateness of language use of speakers within the scope of the interaction (between a speaker and a hearer).

A speaker must not only follow the linguistic rules but also meet the needs of conversational postulates (Gordon-Lakoff 1975) and conversational maxims as suggested by Grice (1967, 1975) who introduced four Maxims or Principles of Cooperative Behavior which speakers observe in conversation:

1) Maxim of Quantity : Make your contribution just as informative as required

2) Maxim of Quality : Make your contribution one that is true

3) Maxim of Relation: Make your contribution relevant

4) Maxim of Manner : Avoid obscurity and ambiguity. Be brief and orderly.

Conversational Implicature (Grice 1975), which is contrasted with Conventional Implicature, functions on the basis of these four maxims mentioned above.

There is another principle called Politeness Principle (Leech 1983) which is important in this area and classified into six categories :

1) Tact Maxim : Minimize cost to other (Maximize benefit to other)

2) Generosity Maxim: Minimize benefit to self (Maximize cost to self)

3) Approbation Maxim : Minimize dispraise of other (Maximize praise of other)

4) Modesty Maxim : Minimize praise of self (Maximize dispraise of

self)

5)  Agreement Maxim : Minimize disagreement between self and other (Maximize agreement between self and other)

6)  Sympathy Maxim : Minimize antipathy between self and other (Maximize sympathy between self and other)

These six maxims can be grouped into three pairs ( 1) and 2), 3) and 4), 5) and 6)), each of which is playing a complementary role individually with a special emphasis on the politeness in the speaker-hearer interaction either from the speaker's side or from the hearer's side.

Since conversation and most other talk is a collaborative activity that can be successful only if the speaker respects, or takes into account, the rights, capabilities, and feeling of the participants, speakers attempt to express politeness by the performance of speech acts and use indirect speech acts to imply their intentions. Although there are certain conventions for the linguistic utterance of intentions in order to express politeness or cooperativeness, there are no fixed mapping rules and in most of the cases the resulting speech act is implicit or indirect.

The analysis of speech acts or the speech act theory in this section gave information about various aspects of speech acts. The next section will investigate the relation between Speech Act Theory and "Speaking" by observing the fidings from Speech Act Theory in this section.

## 8.  The Relation between Speech Act Theory and "Speaking"

This section will examine the relation between Speech Act Theory and "Speaking" by observing the following 10 points which Speech Act Theory could suggest from the preceding section in connection with the concept of speaking.

1)  Speech Act Theory shows that the meaning of an utterance is determined not only by linguistic forms but also by the functions.

2)  Speech Act Theory demonstrates that an utterance can provide propositional content and at the same time perform an interactional function.

3)  Speech Act Theory shows that a speaker always expresses an

utterance with a specific purpose (or intention).

4)    Speech Act Theory suggests that a second language learner needs to acquire the sociocultural rules of appropriate language use in speaking in order to become proficient and appropriate in the target language.

5)    Speech Act Theory provides us with a better understanding of how human communicative interaction is carried out.

6)    Speech Act Theory describes similarities and differences in the ways in which interactions are carried out under similar circumstances across languages and cultures.

7)    Speech Act Theory has made us realize the need to account for the rules that govern the use of language in context.

8)    Speech Act Theory tells us to look at speech acts not only from the grammatical perspective but also from others such as cross-cultural, intracultural and individual perspectives.

9)    Speech Act Theory shows that we should look at "speaking" as a speaker-hearer interaction with a speaker's intention.

10)    Speech Act Theory demonstrates that we should evaluate "speaking" from principles, appropriateness and functions rather than from rules, grammaticality and forms.

Taking into consideration these explored aspects of "speaking" from the idea of Speech Act Theory mentioned above, we will examine, in the next section, some possible profits and problems of these (speech acts) aspects of "speaking" in a proposed test which will include speech acts (illocutionary acts), from the practical point of view.

## 9.    Possible Profits and Problems of Using Speech Acts in the Testing of Speaking

This section will investigate some possible profits and problems of the use of speech acts in the testing of speaking.

**9.1**    Profits of the use of speech acts in the testing of speaking

1)    We can test "speaking ability" not only from linguistic ability (especially phonological ability) but also communicative ability

(the real language use in the speaker-hearer interaction).

2)  We can evaluate "speaking ability" in speech acts from the viewpoint of principles, appropriateness and functions rather than from that of rules, grammaticality and forms.

3)  We can tell whether or not a second language learner has acquired the sociocultural rules of appropriate language use in the target language by setting the level.

4)  We can use a range of acceptability (not strict correctness) to evaluate a speaker's performance of speech acts.

5)  We can find a student with an excellent grammatical and lexical command of the target language but with little communication ability and can give some relevant remedial instruction to him/her.

**9.2**  Problems of the use of speech acts in the testing of speaking

1)  Since speech acts can vary from culture to culture, it is difficult to find a norm of speech acts across cultures for testing.

2)  Since speech acts are apt to be dependent on situations, it is difficult to set up a fixed criteria of speech acts for testing.

3)  Since the illocutionary force in illocutionary act can occur simultaneously and multifunctionally, it is difficult to specify a single separate illocutionary force to test.

4)  Although the outstanding feature of speech act behavior is variability, in reality, it is difficult for testers to set up a range of acceptable answers to meet the variability.

5)  Since a hearer's recognition ability is involved in the speaker-hearer interaction, it is sometimes difficult to decide on either the speaker's ability or the hearer's ability when the communication is successful in a test of speaking.


## 10.  Conclusion

The following points could be drawn as concluding remarks to support the relevance of using the idea of speech acts (illocutionary competence) in the author's proposed speaking test (although some of the points need

specific conditions to solve the practical problems of speech acts raised in the preceding section).

1)  In the testing of "speaking" such a category as illocutionary competence (speech acts), where the speaker-hearer interaction is highly evaluated and the speaker's intention is well considered, is necessary.

2)  The illocutionary competence (which is rather focusing on the illocutionary act with illocutionary force than on the other two aspects like utterance act and propositional act) seems to be enough as a testing category because the illocutionary act usually plyas an important role and the meaning of illocutionary forces is crucially important in the real context compared with functions of the other two aspects of utterance act and propositional act.

3)  Although Bachman uses four functions (ideational, manipulative, heuristic and imaginative) as sub-divisions of illocutionary competence in his Communicative Language Ability, the illocutionary competence (concentrating on the speech act theory) with illocutionary force is relevant and practical for the testing of speaking.

4)  In testing speech act (illocutionary competence), the idea of appropriateness should be highly thought of as well as the idea of principles and functions.

5)  In testing illocutionary competence, we must select the sub-divisions (testing categories) which are conventional or independent of the situations.

6)  In testing illocutionary competence, we can choose a specific situation in which one particular illocutionary force can function.

7)  In testing illocutionary competence, we must pick out the situation where almost all native speakers will react in the same way.

8)  Since there may be many levels of illocutionary acts, testers must decide the level of illocutionary act which language learners should master at each stage.

9)  Since speakers must have intention when they start talking, testers should be careful of the elicitation techniques in which testees

can have some intention to speak even in the testing situations.


# APPENDIX

Part I.

Directions:

When you evaluate Japanese students' English speaking ability in class,

how much weight do you put on each category below ?

Please circle one choice for each category. See the example below.

|  | not important | | | important | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EXAMPLE | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Grammatical accuracy | | | | ④ | |
| Vocabulary use | | ② | | | |
| Pronunciation (segmental features) | | | | | ⑤ |


N. B.  If you are not sure of the definition of the eleven categories below, please refer to the following pages where you can find some specific items in each category.

|  | not important | | | important | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Grammatical accuracy | | | | | |
| 2. Vocabulary use | | | | | |
| 3. Pronunciation (segmental features) | | | | | |
| 4. Pronunciation (suprasegmental features) | | | | | |
| 5. Fluency | | | | | |
| 6. Discourse (cohesion and coherence) factors | | | | | |
| 7. Content | | | | | |
| 8. Level of speaker's confidence | | | | | |
| 9. Sociolinguistic cmpetence | | | | | |
| 10. Strategic competence | | | | | |
| 11. Illocutionary competence | | | | | |

Part II.

In part II, each category of Part I will be analysed in detail.

Please circle one choice for each item as in Part I.

|  | not important | | | | important |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grammatical accuracy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Use of grammatically correct word order | | | | | |
| 13. Level of sentence complexity | | | | | |
| 14. Length of utterances | | | | | |
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Correct use of noun-verb agreement | | | | | |
| 16. Correct use of tense/aspect forms | | | | | |
| 17. Ability to use plural forms of nouns | | | | | |
| 18. Proper use of articles | | | | | |
| 19. Proper use of personal pronouns | | | | | |
| 20. Proper use of prepositions | | | | | |
| 21. Use of complete sentences | | | | | |
| Vocabulary use | | | | | |
| 22. Recognition of nuances | | | | | |
| 23. Variety of words | | | | | |
| 24. Choice of idioms | | | | | |
| Pronunciation (segmental features) | | | | | |
| 25. How the speaker produces vowels | | | | | |
| 26. How the speaker produces consonants | | | | | |
| 27. How the speaker produces semivowels | | | | | |
| 28. How the speaker produces diphthongs | | | | | |
| 29. How the speaker produces clusters of sounds | | | | | |
| Pronunciation (suprasegmental features) | | | | | |
| 30. The naturalness of the stress | | | | | |
| 31. The naturalness of the intonation | | | | | |
| 32. The naturalness of the rhythm | | | | | |
| 33. The level of the tone (enough volume) | | | | | |
| 34. Proper use of tone (ie. not monotonic pronunciation) | | | | | |

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Fluency

35. Proper use of pauses     |___|___|___|___|___|

36. Frequency of uncompleted sentences     |___|___|___|___|___|

37. Correct speed of speech     |___|___|___|___|___|

38. Smoothness of the expansion of the topic     |___|___|___|___|___|

39. Ease of speaking     |___|___|___|___|___|

Discourse (cohesion and coherence) factors

40. Logical combination of sentences     |___|___|___|___|___|

41. Skills in paragraph development     |___|___|___|___|___|

                                1    2    3    4    5

42. Flow of ideas     |___|___|___|___|___|

Content

43. The creativity or the imaginativeness of the speech     |___|___|___|___|___|
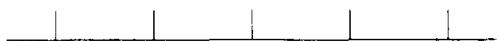
Level of speaker's confidence
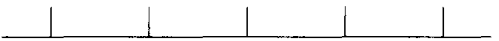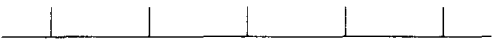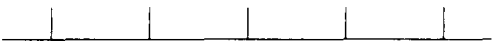
44. Speaker's certainty of the grammatical accuracy     |___|___|___|___|___|

45. Speaker's sureness of the phonological accuracy     |___|___|___|___|___|

46. Speaker's confidence in the choice of words     |___|___|___|___|___|

Sociolinguistic competence (difference in register or difference in variation in language use)

47. Ability to handle the field of discourse (the appropriate language use in the language context)     |___|___|___|___|___|

48. Ability to handle the mode of discourse (the ability to attest to the differences between written and spoken variation in language use)     |___|___|___|___|___|

49. Ability to handle the tenor of discourse (the use of appropriate style among the participants in certain language use contexts)     |___|___|___|___|___|

Strategic competence (in the case of interview or role play)

50. Ability to manage turn-taking
    (taking a turn, holding a turn and
    relinquishing a turn)

51. Ability to start and finish a
    conversation

52. Ability to initiate and respond to
    remarks on a broad range of topics

53. Ability to develop and continue
    speaking on topics

54. Ability to repair trouble spots in
    conversation (communication breakdown
    or comprehension problems)

    1    2    3    4    5

55. Ability to use conversational fillers
    and small talk

56. Ability to use conversational routines

Illocutionary competence (in the case of interview or role play)

57. Ability to manage the utterance act
    (the utterance act: the act of saying
    something)

58. Ability to manage the propositional act
    (a propositional act: referring to
    something, or expressing a
    predication about something)

59. Ability to manage the illocutionary act
    (the illocutionary act: the function
    (e.g. assertion, warning, request)
    performed in saying something)

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