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**CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFICIENT SPEAKING
SKILLS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE:
Empirically-derived criteria for
assessing speaking competence**

A Pro Gradu Thesis

by

Sari Komulainen

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Sari Komulainen
CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFICIENT SPEAKING
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Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää miten puhumista arvioidaan. Tutkielmassa vastataan kysymyksiin: 1. Millaisia piirteitä voidaan liittää hyvään englannin puhumiseen? 2. Millaisia sisäisiä rakenteita ja käsityksiä haastateltavilla on puhumisesta? Lähtökohtana tutkielmalle on Bachmanin viestinnällinen malli kielitaidosta. Tutkielma on kuvaileva. Materiaali koostuu Yleisten Kielitutkintojen Englannin testeistä valituista yhdeksästä puhenäytteestä, joita viisitoista haastateltavaa vertailevat keskenään. Haastateltavat on jaettu kolmeen ryhmään: englannin ja arvioinnin asiantuntijat, englannin asiantuntijat ja arvioinnin asiantuntijat.

Tutkimuksen metodina on käytetty Repertory Grid -tekniikkaa, jonka avulla ihmisten sisäisiä käsityksiä voidaan tarkastella. Haastateltavia on pyydetty kertomaan puhenäytteiden eroista ja samanlaisuuksista. Tutkielman tuloksena on haastateltujen käsitykseen pohjautuva luonnehdinta - tutkimuksessa tehty luokittelu - millaista on hyvä englannin puhetaito. Tärkeimpiä piirteitä ovat sujuvuus, tekstin pituus, kieliopillinen oikeus ja ääntämisen laatu.

Asiasanat: speaking proficiency, communicative language ability, Repertory Grid -technique, empirically-derived criteria, inner constructs

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1 INTRODUCTION

It seems that second language *speaking* has not been identified as a research area as willingly as for example reading or writing. In other words speaking is not completely accepted as a separate area (e.g. Bygate, 1998:20). This is one reason why it seems relevant to study foreign language speaking, and explore the various ways it can be assessed. It is also important to explore the differences that exist between spoken and written language, since there are some profound differences, as shown in the next paragraph.

According to Bygate (1998), speech is more commonly unplanned, contextualised, informal and reciprocal than writing. Oral language can be identified by certain features which are more prototypical of speech than of writing. One of these features is that speech is organised by clauses, phrases and spoken utterances while writing is generally organised according to whole sentences. Also, in oral language it is quite typical to express involvement in the spoken interaction while written language is characterized by features that indicate detachment. Typically, spoken language is less formal in relation to vocabulary and grammar than written language and it features words (e.g. *and, but*) that join words, phrases and clauses whereas written language is characterized by subordination of clauses. In addition, spoken language is characterized by repetition of utterances, close relation to the context in question and features of correcting speech. (Bygate, 1998:21.)

Certain supplementary characteristics exist in spoken language. Typically they are particular discourse structures or moves, for example question-answer sequences, particular speech acts for example greetings, particular grammatical features for example first and second personal pronouns and particular features of the speech stream for example pauses and hesitations. (Bygate, 1998:21.)

Since speaking can be defined primarily as performance (i.e. *speaking is performing*), it is no wonder that oral foreign language proficiency calls increasingly for tests whose evaluation is based on a performance-based concept of language proficiency. In performance-based tests candidates are assumed to produce complex answers while integrating their various skills of the target language and knowledge into "life-like situations". These kinds of tests usually require more than a single test method and evaluations made by *human raters*. Therefore, the test method and the rater have become important parts of performance-based tests and they have a significant impact on the test scores. (Chalhoub-Deville, 1995:16.; more on language testing e.g. Spolsky 1990; Douglas 1995)

Shohamy (1982:162) thinks along the same lines and suggests that any attempt to assess a learner's overall proficiency in a language must take into account the learner's own ability to use the language orally in *real communicative surroundings*. This supplements a communicative feature to speaking performance in addition to the actual performance. This communicative view is fundamental to Savignon's (1983) perspective to language proficiency. She states that 'language proficiency *is* communicative competence, and should be defined and evaluated as such' [emphasis original] (Savignon 1983:1983).

If speaking is considered as a communicative performance, its assessment should be based on scales and criteria which have been derived from the performance of speakers (e.g. Turner, 1998:204; more on assessment and performance for example Coniam 1995; Fulcher 1997; Shohamy 1990, 1995; Valdman 1987). In other words, there is a demand for empirically-derived criteria. The present thesis is an attempt to contribute to satisfying this demand.

Before discussing further the research questions of the present thesis, it is necessary to introduce the most influential assessment

scales of foreign language speaking. The Foreign Service Institute scale (FSI) from the year 1975, can be considered the first and definitely the most influential scale for language proficiency, and it has many successor scales. In FSI, the evaluation of oral proficiency consists of accent, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. One of FSI's successors is the Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings, (ASLPR) from the year 1982. ASLPR's definition of speaking is not divided into any particular subskills. The scale consists of detailed descriptions of general speaking proficiency and specific tasks in each nine proficiency levels. ACTFL, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language Proficiency Guidelines (1986), is yet another successor of FSI. ACTFL uses Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) for testing speaking proficiency. Speaking proficiency includes the following characteristics: global tasks -function, context, content, accuracy and text type. (North 1993:94, 103-105, 107-115.)

It is necessary to introduce one more scale, namely the Finnish Certificates of Foreign Language Proficiency (FC in this study). This scale is closely related to the data of the present study: the secondary data consists of exam speaking samples provided by the FC. Its criteria for speaking proficiency is divided into two sections: advanced level and preliminary and intermediate levels. Preliminary and intermediate levels include: 1.communication and intelligibility, 2.pronunciation, 3.fluency, 4.vocabulary, and 5.structures. Advanced level includes:1.pronunciation, 2.accuracy of structures and vocabulary, and idiomacy, 3.fluency, 4.discourse skills and linguistic appropriacy, and 5.presentation. (Huhta 1997:30.) (More on FC e.g. Huhta and Takala, 1997; more on scales e.g. Shohamy 1982; Higgs and Clifford 1983; Huhta 1990; Leung and Teasdale 1997; Saleva 1997; Chalhoub-Deville 1997)

As suggested above, the purpose of this master's thesis is to explore possible criteria that could be used for assessing foreign

language speaking proficiency. The data of this study consist of 22 interviews that were conducted to survey 15 interviewees' internal construction of quality in speaking. The interviews were conducted by using a Repertory Grid technique which gives an insight into these inner constructs and makes it possible to extract a set of potential criteria based on them.

The speaking samples that were used as stimuli in the interviews were originally collected for the purposes of a large EU project called DIALANG. In this project the intention was to research the different possibilities of assessing and diagnosing speaking proficiency and this thesis is a part of this continuing research. The project is coordinated by the Centre for Applied Language Studies in the University of Jyväskylä. Since the same centre co-ordinates also the FC, it was quite natural to make use of the exam speaking samples in the case of DIALANG.

The present study is structured so that the theoretical background of the present thesis will first be introduced. Then the data and research method of the thesis will be discussed. After this, the results of the thesis will be presented, analysed and discussed.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this section the relevant terms used in this study will be presented and the theoretical background of the present study will be introduced in the following order: 1. language performance, 2. performance-based model of language proficiency, 3. rating of language proficiency, 4. communicative competence, 5. Bachman's model of communicative language ability, and 6. the present study.

2.1 Language performance

One of the most influential ideas of language performance can be found in Hymes's theory concerning communicative competence (which will be introduced later in this study) from 1967 and 1972 . Hymes makes a distinction between *actual instances of language use* and *abstract models of the underlying knowledge and capacities involved in language use*. This is a further development of Chomsky's competence and performance distinction from 1965. (McNamara 1996:54.)

According to McNamara (1996) it is possible to distinguish three general uses of the term "performance" in the field of language testing:

1. As a term in a theory of 2nd language ability and use, as in Chomsky's competence and performance or the discussion of the term performance in the work of Hymes (1972) and Canale and Swain (1980);
2. implying skilled execution, as in a musical or theoretical performance or of some athletic or gymnastic skill. Here the emphasis is on display for an audience, and the demonstration of level of underlying skill; and
3. performances of real-world tasks, as in work sample tests, where the test involves direct stimulation of real-world roles and tasks. (McNamara, 1990:26.)

Since the secondary data of this study consists of learners who are expected to demonstrate their level of foreign language proficiency in a testing situation by performing assignments which resemble real-world tasks, it is quite natural in the present thesis to understand language performance as a combination of the definitions number 2 and 3.

2.2 Performance-based model of language proficiency

According to McNamara (1996), many models of testing language proficiency today have weaknesses (e.g. Canale and Swain). Models of language proficiency put much emphasis on the individual candidate itself, instead of concentrating more on the *candidate in interaction* (i.e. performance; see Figure 1) as they should. Language proficiency should be seen as “involving social interaction”. Another weakness that McNamara points out is the lack of measurement of different variables affecting the testing situation. For instance the age, sex, education, native speaker status and personal qualities of both the interlocutor and the candidate are likely to influence the candidate’s performance in a testing situation. According to McNamara, there is also a need to determine what is possible and appropriate to evaluate in a testing situation. (McNamara, 1996:85-87.)

The interactional characteristics of performance-based evaluation are represented in Figure 1 below. As can be seen from the figure, assessment is quite a complex procedure. It involves a candidate, an interlocutor, a task, a performance, a scale or a set of criteria and a rater. The candidate performs given tasks with the help of the interlocutor - who can be the rater itself, another candidate, or someone else. The above mentioned speaker qualities are left unanswered in this model. Both the task, or the interpretation of the task by the candidate, and the interlocutor have an influence on the actual performance. The performance of the candidate is then assessed by the rater, who in turn has made her/his own interpretation of the scale/criteria used to evaluate the performance. Thus, it can be said that rating is the result of the rater’s perception of the candidate’s spoken performance which is guided by the rater’s own inner interpretation of the scale/criteria. This view is also fundamental in the present study.

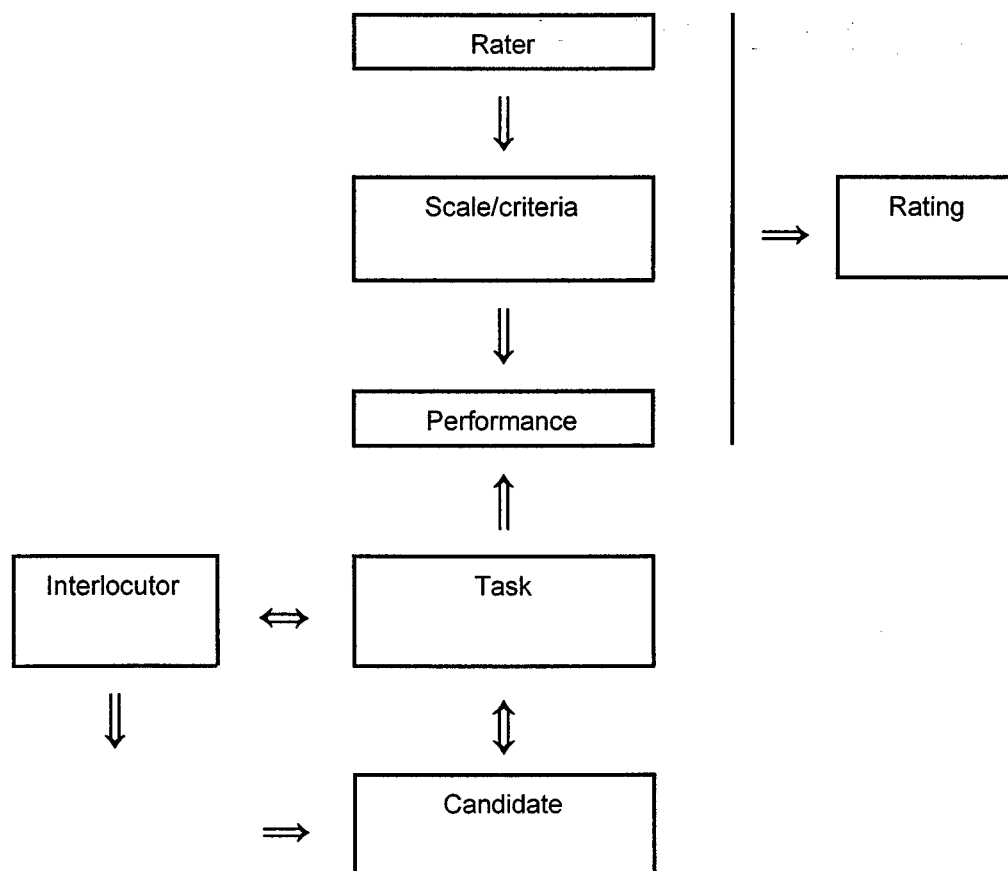


Figure 1. Language proficiency and its relation to performance (McNamara, 1996:86)

2.3 Rating of language proficiency

Every assessment of human performance inevitably entails subjective judgements. Since the nature of human performance is usually complex it can scarcely be evaluated automatically. The judgements a rater makes are typically complex and involve necessarily acts of interpretation on the part of the rater, and thus they are subject to disagreement. For a long time this fact has been acknowledged and people have suggested various methods for recognising and quantifying the amount of disagreement between raters. Normally this is done by

very carefully both training the raters and monitoring the rating itself. (McNamara, 1996:114.; more on rating of language proficiency e.g. Hasselgren 1997; McNamara and Lumley 1997)

According to McNamara (1996) the best traditional way to involve fairness in assessment includes the following features:

1. the use of carefully worded descriptions of performance at each possible score level; so if it is believed that 9 levels of achievement on the task can be distinguished, each of these will be defined carefully, and examples provided of scripts illustrating the characteristics of a performance at this level;
2. the use of raters who have been trained carefully in the use of the rating procedure, and who have demonstrated a required level of agreement with other raters in moderation sessions;
3. the practice of rating each script more than once, and the adoption of procedures for dealing with disagreement, such as averaging ratings, getting a further rating, or bringing the raters to reach agreement. (McNamara, 1996:114.)

McNamara states that some of these features are too often ignored and not put in action together on grounds of financial savings. Also, people do sometimes believe that the straightforward definition of the levels of achievement, with the support of examples of performances, together with careful training, will make the participation of more than one rater needless. (McNamara, 1996:114.)

As can be seen from the summary in Figure 2, in the traditional response assessment model, the score is extracted directly from the instrument, i.e. answers to a test which consists of multiple-choice questions. It deals only with the interaction of the candidate and the test instrument, and simultaneously, the scores of candidates function as proof of the candidates' abilities as well as the quality of the actual instrument. In the performance-based model the instrument also elicits a performance which is then assessed, i.e. rated by using a scale. This model presents another kind of interaction which mediates the scoring event: interaction between the rater and the scale. This interaction (rater-scale) is similar to the above mentioned interaction of the subject and the instrument. According to McNamara (1996) the rater-scale

interaction “is like a ‘test’ of the raters (and the scale) in the way that the subject-instrument interaction is a test of the subjects (and of the instrument)”.(McNamara, 1996:117-118.)

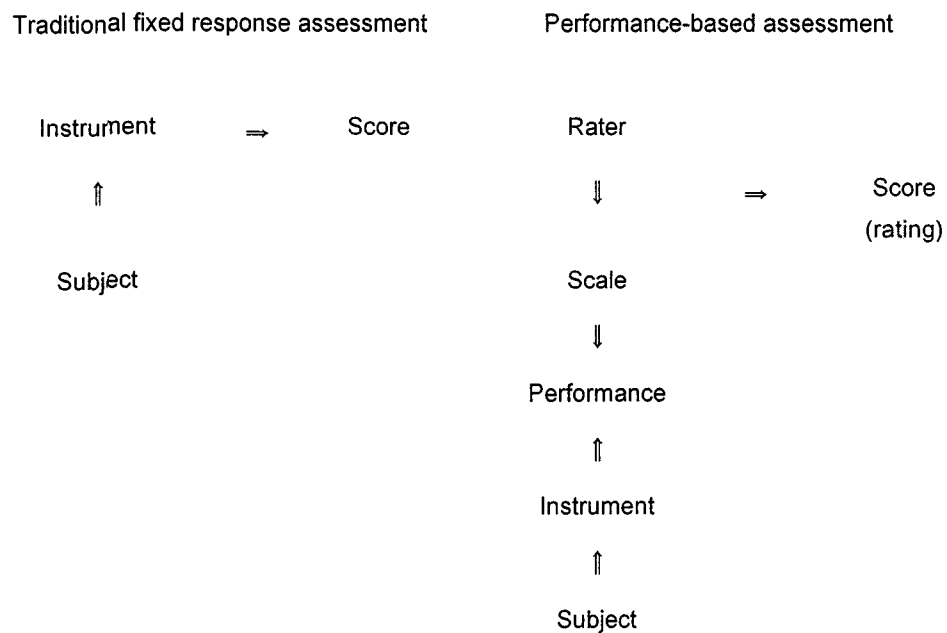


Figure 2. The effect of the presence of the rater in the assessment process (McNamara, 1996:117)

There are four factors which may cause raters to rate differently. The most simple ones are that raters may differ in their *overall leniency* and that they may *interpret* the used rating scale *differently*. Raters may also show certain patterns of harshness or leniency in regards to *only one* group of candidates or *particular tasks*. The fourth and perhaps the most obvious factor is that the raters may vary in terms of their *consistency / inconsistency* when rating.(McNamara:1996:119-122, Lumley and McNamara, 1995.) Also, one cannot ignore the speaker and rater qualities which are involved in the testing situation.

There are other aspects that may influence the evaluation by raters, namely the setting of the performance. For instance, candidates

with a certain language background may receive a higher score than others, candidate's gender and voice may also have an effect on the evaluation as well as the actual physical time and setting of both the performance and the evaluation. (McNamara, 1996:124.)

Usually native speakers are considered more suitable raters than non-native speakers. However, Hill's (1997:288) study dealing with non-native speakers as raters suggests otherwise. According to it, there is evidence that non-native raters are at least as suitable - may be even more suitable - to rate a test of English language proficiency as native speakers. Also, Kenyon (1997:272) found out in his study that the ratings of native individuals who have trained themselves *successfully* are as reliable as those of expert native raters.

2.4 Communicative competence

As suggested before, since language proficiency is a communicative competence, it is necessary to give here a short introduction of the concept. Hymes was the first to introduce the far-reaching concept of communicative competence in 1964. The term aimed to cover all sorts of knowledge that a fluent speaker of a language must have in order to be able to produce and comprehend contextually appropriate and understandable utterances in a particular language. The development of communicative competence was an indirect result of the reaction to Chomsky's definition of linguistic theory. Communicative competence for Chomsky is grammatical *knowledge* which is a mental state situated underneath the level of language, not an *ability* to do anything which is the core idea of Hymes' idea. In other words communicative competence for Hymes is the *ability to use language*. (Blum-Kulka 1982: 29; Spolsky 1989; Widdowson 1989.; more on communicative competence e.g. Cazden 1989; Davies 1989; Henning and Carcallar 1992)

Following in Hymes' footsteps, for example Savignon (1972, 1983) and Canale and Swain have discussed and worked on the notion of communicative competence. Canale and Swain (1980) divided communicative competence into three significant and far-reaching factors: 1. linguistic competence (morphology, syntax, semantics and phonology), 2. sociolinguistic competence (sociocultural and textual rules) and 3. strategic competence (ability to make up for a lack of knowledge of grammar or vocabulary in a communication situation). In 1983 Canale divided sociolinguistic competence further into textual competence (coherence and cohesion) and sociolinguistic competence (appropriateness of form and meaning). Canale and Swain's idea has, in fact, influenced many researchers, one of them is Lyle Bachman whose model will be introduced in more detail below.

2.5 Bachman's model of communicative language ability (CLA)

It can be said that Bachman's (1990) view of communicative language ability is the most influential framework of language proficiency in the contemporary world. Since the model is widely acknowledged and accepted as a suitable model for language proficiency, it is also used as the basis for the categorization of the present study's results. Bachman takes the idea of communicative competence further. His model consists of five components. Figure 3 is a summary of the components - and their interaction - in Bachman's model of communicative language ability.

Bachman (1990) gives detailed definitions of his components. According to him, *language competence* is "a set of specific knowledge components that are utilized in communication via language". *Strategic competence* is "the mental capacity for implementing the components of language competence in contextualised communicative language use".

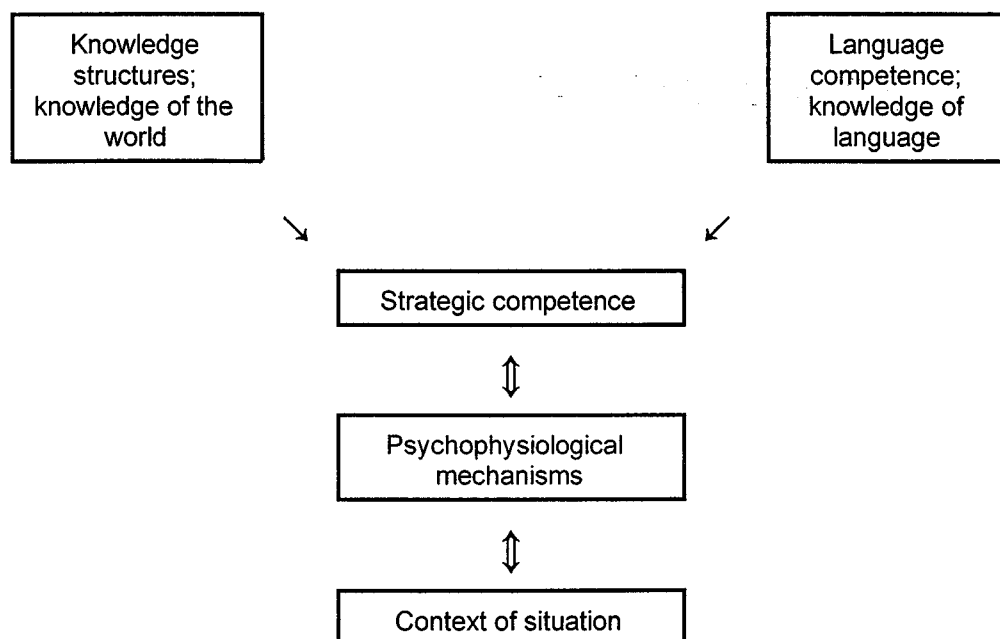


Figure 3. Summary of Bachman's components (Bachman 1990:84)

Bachman's model provides the means to relate language competencies to "features of the context of situation in which language use takes place and to the language user's knowledge structures (sociocultural knowledge, 'real-world' knowledge)". *Psychophysiological mechanisms* are "the neurological and psychological processes involved in the actual execution of language as a physical phenomenon". Since language and strategic competencies form the very essence of Bachman's model they will be looked into more detail in the following chapters. (Bachman 1990:84.)

2.5.1 Language competence

Bachman divides his language competence further into organizational and pragmatic competencies which in turn consist of several categories. The components of Bachman's language competence - organizational and pragmatic - and their inner hierarchical relationships are represented in Figure 4. It is worth noting that in language use these components interact with each other and with the aspects of the language use situation, i.e. they are not independent of each other. According to Bachman, this interaction between the different components and the context of language use portrays communicative language use. (Bachman, 1990:86-87.)

Organizational competence consists of abilities that are used when controlling formal structures of language. These are involved when we produce or recognize grammatically correct sentences, comprehend the propositional content of sentences and put them in order to form comprehensible texts. There are two types of abilities: *grammatical* and *textual*. (Bachman, 1990:87.)

Grammatical competence comprises the competencies that are involved in language usage. These are *lexical* competence i.e. *vocabulary*, *morphological* competence, *syntactical* competence and *phonological/graphonological* competence, which control the selection of words to "express specific significations, their forms, their arrangement in utterances to express propositions, and their physical realizations, either as sounds or as written symbols". (Bachman, 1990:87.)

Textual competence consists of the knowledge of conventions for combining utterances together as a text, either spoken or written. Text includes utterances or sentences which are built according to the rules of *cohesion* and *rhetorical organization*. Conversational language

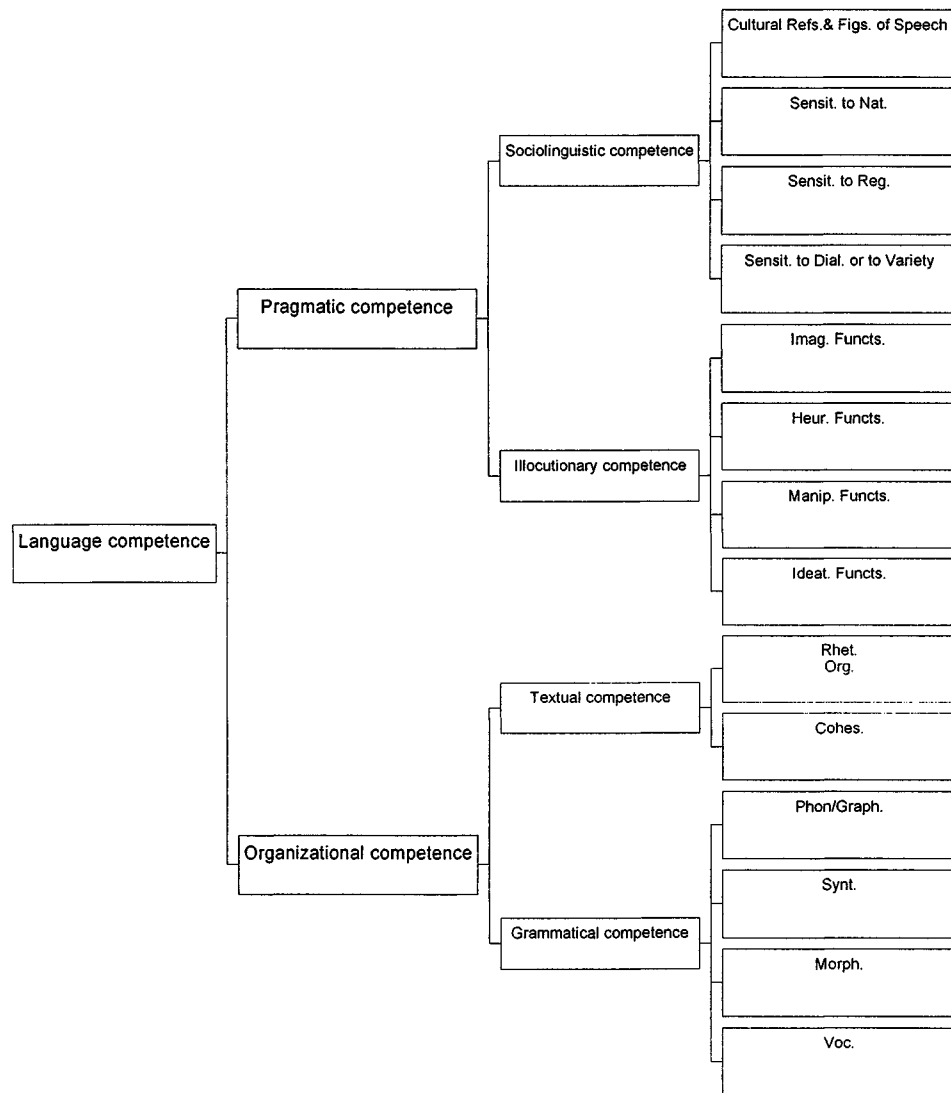


Figure 4. Components of Bachman's language competence and their hierarchical relationships

use is also embedded in textual competence. According to Hatch (Bachman, 1990:88), such conventions as topic nomination and development, and conversation maintenance seem to be interlocutors' ways to organize conversational discourse and perform in conversational situations, and they may be partially similar to the rhetorical patterns observable in written discourse. (Bachman, 1990:88.)

Pragmatic competence deals with the relationships between linguistic signs and their referents, and language users and the context of communication. As Bachman further explains, pragmatic competence is "concerned with the relationships between utterances and the acts or functions that speakers (or writers) intend to perform through these utterances, which can be called the *illocutionary force* of utterances, and the characteristics of the context of language use that determine the *appropriateness* of utterances. [emphasis original]" Bachman's idea of pragmatic competence consist of *illocutionary* and *sociolinguistic* competencies. He defines illocutionary competence as the knowledge of the pragmatic conventions for expressing and performing suitable language functions and sociolinguistic competence as the knowledge of the sociolinguistic conventions for performing these language functions properly in a certain context. (Bachman, 1990:89-90.)

Bachman introduces illocutionary competence in relation to the Speech act theory (see e.g. Austin (1962) and Searle (1969)). There are three types of speech acts: utterance act (the act of saying), propositional act (the act of referring to something or expressing a predication about something) and illocutionary act (the function performed in an utterance). One uses illocutionary competence when wanting to express and interpret illocutionary forces in language. A broader framework needs to be taken into account in illocutionary competence to explain how the difference between form and function of language use is connected to the expression and interpretation of

language. Bachman makes use of Halliday's description of language functions. (Bachman, 1990:90-92.)

Halliday (1978) sees a functional relationship between language and social structure. He makes a distinction between language as system and language as institution. Halliday further suggests that language as system is stratified i.e. "a three-level coding system consisting of a semantics, a lexicogrammar and a phonology" and that the semantic system is arranged into "*functional* components (ideational, including experiential and logical; interpersonal; textual)" [emphasis original] (Halliday, 1978:183). This is the basic idea that Bachman in turn uses to complement his notion of illocutionary competence. He divides language functions into four "macro-functions" which are: 1. *ideational*, 2. *manipulative*, 3. *heuristic* and 4. *imaginative* (Bachman, 1990:92).

Ideational function of language use is clearly the most pervasive function of them all. Via it we may express meaning in regards to our experience of the concrete world i.e. we may use language to represent propositions, our feelings and our knowledge. Bachman (1990) calls functions which primarily focus on affecting the surrounding world as manipulative functions. These are for instance suggestions, requests and warnings as well as phatic language use, i.e. greetings. This function can be seen to an extent corresponding to Halliday's (1978) interpersonal function of language. Heuristic function of language use is connected to acquiring more knowledge and information of the world surrounding us and it can be found for example in acts of teaching and learning. Bachman's last function, imaginative function, is different from Halliday's description and it makes it possible for us to "create or extend our own environment for humorous or aesthetic purposes" i.e. focus is on the language use itself. (Bachman, 1990:92-94.)

According to Bachman (1990), even though he represents and discusses the functions individually, the functions are connected to each other in real-life circumstances; in language use we perform many functions at the same time. He emphasizes that most language use situations involve "the performance of multiple functions in connected utterances, and it is the connections among these functions that provide coherence to discourse". (Bachman, 1990:94.)

Sociolinguistic competence is, in Bachman's view, the ability to perform language functions which are right and appropriate for the context of language use in question. In other words he suggests that this competence deals with people's sensitiveness to, or control of, various conventions of language use which are determined by context. According to Bachman, the following quite clear and self-explanatory abilities are included into sociolinguistic competence: "*sensitivity to differences in dialect or variety, to differences in register and to naturalness, and the ability to interpret cultural references and figures of speech*" [emphasis added]. (Bachman, 1990:94-95.)

To summarise, language competence is divided into two competences, organizational and pragmatic. Organizational competence consists of knowledge used when creating or identifying grammatically correct utterances, when understanding the propositional content of the utterances, and when arranging utterances to form texts, either oral or written. Pragmatic competence consists of knowledge which is used in the contextualised performance and when interpreting illocutionary acts. Pragmatic competence also includes knowledge of a) language functions, b) sociolinguistic rules of appropriateness and c) cultural references and figurative language. (Bachman, 1990:98.)

2.5.2 Strategic competence

Bachman describes his notion of strategic competence drawing on Færch and Kasper's description of communication strategies. Their model explains only "the use of communication strategies in interlanguage communication", while Bachman views it as a significant part of *all* communicative language use. His idea is divided into three components. They are: *assessment*, *planning* and *execution*. (Bachman, 1990:100.)

Assessment component makes it possible for us to 1. recognize the needed information for understanding a certain communicative target in its context; 2. decide which language competencies are available to us for most efficiently reaching that communicative target; 3. discover the abilities and knowledge our interlocutors have and we share with them; and 4. assess to which extent the communicative target has been reached (see also Figure 5). The planning component fetches appropriate and relevant items (for instance grammatical, illocutionary) from our language competence. With the help of this component we are able to make plans with the intention of achieving a communicative target via the realization of these plans. Execution component implements the plans "in the modality and channel appropriate to the communicative goal and the context" by drawing on psychophysiological mechanisms. (Bachman, 1990:100-103.)

As Bachman has indicated, communication consists of dynamic interaction between context and discourse. This means that communicative language use is defined by the production and interpretation of texts and by the relationship existing between a text and its context. Bachman states that the interpretation of discourse calls for the ability to use language competencies to evaluate the context for relevant information and to combine this information to the information

of the discourse. "It is the function of strategic competence to match the new information to be processed with relevant information that is available (including presuppositional and real world knowledge) and map this onto maximally efficient use of existing language abilities." (Bachman 1990:102.)

To summarise, Bachman's framework (see Figure 5) describes communicative language ability as *knowledge* of language and the *capacity for implementing that knowledge in communicative language use situations*. The ability consists of *language* and *strategic competencies* and *psychophysiological mechanisms*. Language competence is divided into *organizational* and *pragmatic competencies*. Strategic competence is the ability which *connects language competence* - or knowledge of language - to the *knowledge structures* of the language user and to the features of the *context* in which the communication occurs. Strategic competence includes a general *assessment* of the communicative situation, *planning* process which retrieves needed items from the language competence and *execution* phase of language use. These functions determine the *most influential* means to *achieve* a particular communicative *goal*. The psychophysiological mechanisms that are involved in language use define the *channel* (auditory, visual) and the *mode* (receptive, productive) in which competencies are implemented. (Bachman 1990:107-108.)

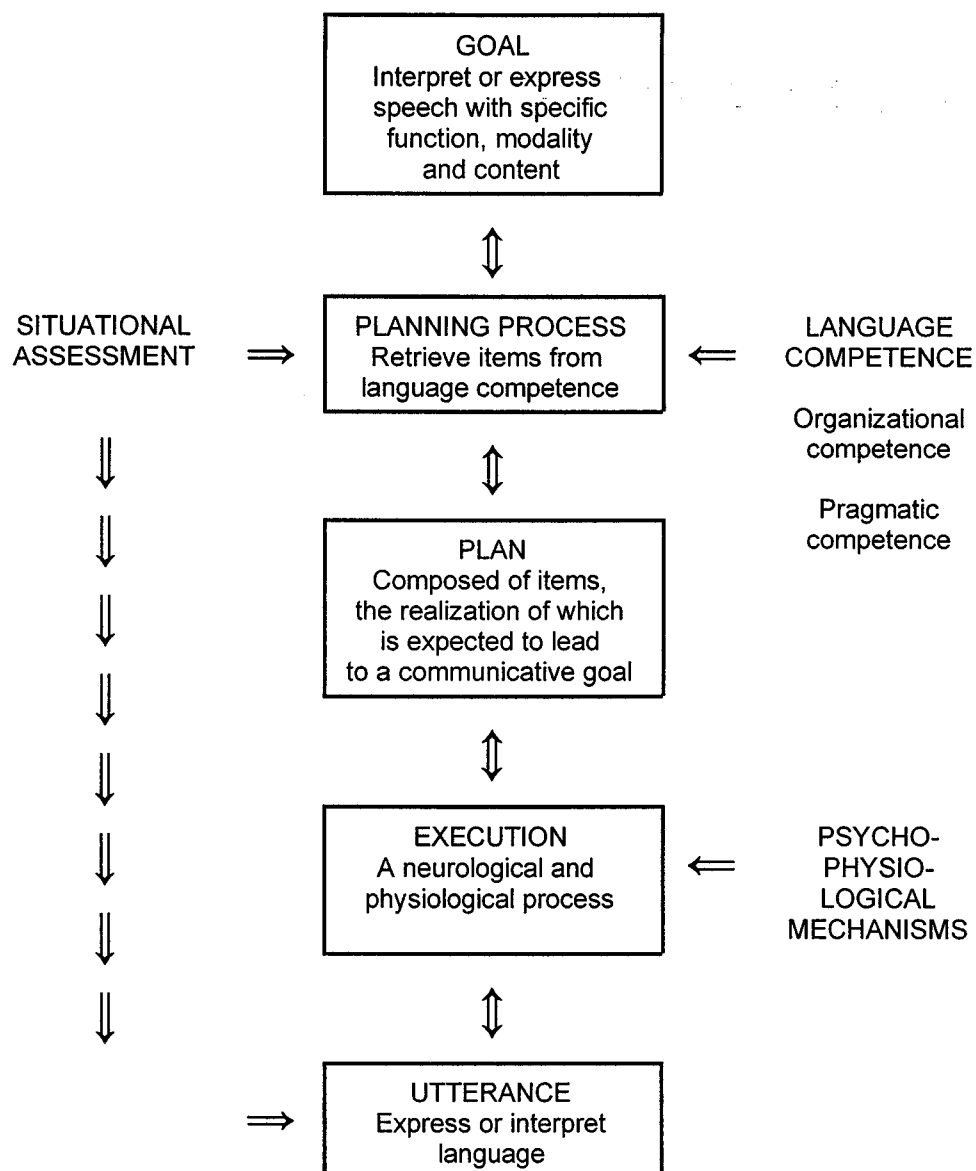


Figure 5. Bachman's model of communicative language ability (Bachman 1990:103)

2.5.3. An example of adapting Bachman's model

Hasselgren (1998) uses Bachman's model of communicative language ability (CLA) in her study of speaking proficiency. The relevance of her adaptation to this study is that it suggests that the framework of communicative language ability can be used in practice. Hasselgren's model serves also as a guiding framework for the present study, especially since it deals with the characteristics of speaking proficiency as does the present study. The categorization of the results in the present study will be done according to Hasselgren's model to the extent it is possible.

Hasselgren adapts Bachman's model of CLA to suit her own study. Her model consists of four abilities - instead of competencies, since the model has to primarily serve "as a basis for describing the actual language behaviour that indicates what pupils are able to do with their language" (Hasselgren 1998:46) - which are: microlinguistic ability, textual ability, pragmatic ability and strategic ability. Instead of using a broad concept of language competence, as Bachman does, Hasselgren represents three abilities - microlinguistic, textual and pragmatic - which are similar to the subcompetencies of Bachman's language competence.

Like in Bachman's model strategic ability is also included in Hasselgren's model. According to her (1998), strategic ability is very closely involved in speaking by leaving behind quite clear evidence for example in communication strategies to overcome 'gaps' in speech. By this particular division Hasselgren seems to emphasize especially the features of speaking and the situation of testing speaking. She gives general descriptions of the abilities - in contrast to Bachman's quite detailed descriptions - which she considers to be the most significant factors for her perspective of communicative language ability. Hasselgren's four-part model can be summarised as follows.

MICROLINGUISTIC ABILITY

the ability to access and use with some degree of correctness the essential systems of language at the level of the sentence/utterance and below, ie vocabulary, morphology, syntax and phonology.

TEXTUAL ABILITY

the ability to make a text 'coherent with respect to itself', involving cohesion as the expression of semantic relations and the use of markers and routines that build structure into conversation as well as the organisational ability to structure information.

PRAGMATIC ABILITY

the ability to use and interpret language in the way that it is typically used and interpreted by the society and in the particular situation in which the communication is taking place.

STRATEGIC ABILITY

the ability to use devices to keep conversation going in face of difficulty and to check for, explain and tackle potential problems in communication. (Hasselgren 1998:49-50.)

According to Hasselgren (1998:54), there is, however, one constraint that affects the domain of CLA: the situation of the examinees. Specifically she refers to "the *topics* they are expected to be able to address, the *conditions* under which they should be able to communicate and the *functions* they can be expected to perform through their speaking, as well as *level* of CLA that can be expected of them." [emphasis original].

Hasselgren (1998) has operationalised the above mentioned components of CLA in her study, i.e. she has described the actual behaviour which functions as an indication for the theoretically defined components of CLA. She has operationalised the components in the following way:

MICROLINGUISTIC ABILITY implies being able to:

1. access and use with some accuracy the stock of words and expressions necessary to put the skills specific to speaking into practice - these largely being common smallwords and formulaic expressions
2. access and use with some accuracy the stock of general and specialised vocabulary and language structures to talk about and 'operate within' the specified topics and associated situations
3. perform functions of all the six specified macro-types, in a straightforward, transparent way

4. produce sounds and intonation patterns well enough to allow the message to come across in full.

TEXTUAL ABILITY implies being able to:

1. produce turn-internal cohesion in such texts as descriptions and narratives, by ordering information conventionally, and by using links, such as pronouns and deictics (eg over *there*) and organising devices such as smallwords acting as discourse markers (eg *well* and *right*)
2. produce across-turn cohesion in such texts as instructions and discussions, by the use of common conversational routines, and through smallwords acting as interactional signals (eg *okay* and *right*)
3. speak smoothly, ie at a rate which is not detrimental to communication and without excessive hesitation. This smoothness may be assisted by formulaic expressions, verbal fillers (eg *you know*) and vague language (eg *sort of*).

PRAGMATIC ABILITY implies being able to:

1. perform functions of all the six specified macro-types, in a conventional, 'idiomatic' way
2. take regard to interlocutor's face, eg through the conventional use of empathisers, politeness expression and hedges (eg *a bit*)
3. use transactional routines according to the purpose and setting of the speaking situation
4. adapt language according to the age and familiarity of the interlocutor
5. communicate by telephone as well as face-to-face.

STRATEGIC ABILITY implies being able to:

1. use communication strategies which primarily employ English (ie analysis-based) and only resorting to other (control-based) strategies as long as these do not involve using non-English forms
2. carry out self-repair, check understanding on the part of the interlocutor, and indicate own lack of understanding, using the (small)words (eg *I mean* and *you know*) and other expression normally employed to carry this out. (Hasselgren 1998:65-66.)

As mentioned above, language proficiency is communicative competence which is divided into several other competencies. Language competence is realized by different competencies (i.e. abilities) which are in turn realized by language performance (speaking, writing). Since speaking can be seen as language proficiency and thus part of communicative competence, it can be examined by using Bachman's communicative language ability. The term speaking competence is used when referring to speaking proficiency.

Since the purpose of this study is to find out what characteristics interviewees associate with speaking competence, it seems natural to

use Hasselgren's adaptation of Bachman's model as the basis for extracting the resulting rating criteria from the data. After all, her study, which contains similar data as in the present thesis, has shown that CLA can be used successfully in the research of speaking proficiency. This study focuses on giving a general description of the data and the results, and does not go into a more specific analysis of the results for example comparing the results of the three interview groups. That could be a possible subject for a further study.

3 THE DATA AND THE METHOD IN THE PRESENT THESIS

In this section data and the research method of the study as well as the relevant terms and definitions will be introduced.

3.1 Repertory Grid technique

Repertory Grid technique method was chosen to be used in the present study, since it is a device which can address the core of the present thesis: how people characterize speaking competence and what kind of skills they associate with it. The answer to these is inside people's minds; it is their own perception of the surrounding society and culture and what they generally consider as good foreign language speaking competence. Since the Grid technique has been successfully used in several fields, for instance in psychology and education, and since it can provide an answer to the questions in the present study, it was a natural choice for the present writer.

Repertory Grid technique method was first developed by George Kelly, whose original book was not unfortunately available for the present writer, in the mid fifties. He described a simple way which made

it possible to go “beyond words”. The idea of this technique is to find out the inner construct system of an individual: how s/he perceives the world. This technique allows us to know what kind of linkages an idea may have with various other ideas, and how a person or an idea can be seen similar to other persons or ideas, and yet different from others. (Fransella and Bannister, 1977)

The Grid technique can be seen as a specialised form of structured interview. The most usual way of discovering someone's personal construct system is by conversation. In Kelly's view, when we are talking with someone we usually “come to understand the way the other person views his world, what goes with what for him, what implies what, what is important and unimportant and in what terms they seek to assess people and places and situations.” (Fransella and Bannister, 1977:4.)

According to Fransella and Bannister (1977:5), Kelly defines a construct as “a way in which two or more things are alike and *thereby* different from a third or more things” [emphasis original]. This description demonstrates directly one procedure which can be used in eliciting constructs. In Kelly's view constructs are essentially bipolars, i.e. his opinion is that people “never affirm anything without simultaneously denying something”. Thus the idea of a construct is quite different from the idea of a concept. Kelly argues further that people make sense of the world by noticing likenesses and differences at the same time. It is this notion of bipolarity that enables the designing of grids. (Fransella and Bannister, 1977:5.)

When designing a Grid technique interview elements must be chosen to represent the area in which construing is to be investigated. In the present study the elements are samples of spoken English. (Fransella and Bannister, 1977:11.)

3.2 Primary and secondary data of the present study

The primary data of the present study includes Grid technique interviews conducted by the present writer. Altogether fifteen people were interviewed. They can be divided into three groups: experienced raters of English test performances (English raters for short), English experts and non-English expert raters. The reason behind this division was to provide as rich interviews, contentwise, as possible. English raters are six individuals who are experienced raters and very competent in English. English experts are six individuals who are also very competent in English, but who do not have any experience of rating. The third group consists of three experienced raters of some other language than English, i.e. they are less competent in English than the other two groups.

The resulting data is a strong combination of both rating experience and English competence, which is crucial when considering the generalizability of the results of this study. After all, this thesis deals with *assessing English* speaking competence. So, it is quite obvious that interviewees should be experts at least in either of them, preferably in both. This seems to guarantee the best possible results contentwise and this choice does not limit views only to one, but gives room for possible differences in perspectives between the groups, thus, making the results richer in content. Also, the grouping of interviewees in this study share characteristics with Chalhoub-Deville's (1995:20) study.

English speaking material taped during spring 1997 forms the secondary data of this study. The material was gathered - before this study - from clients of the Finnish Certificate of Foreign Language Proficiency (FC) exam. The clients took part in an oral English exam in language laboratories in three different levels (preliminary, intermediate and advanced). As in any exam, the clients' performances were

evaluated and later, 55 speaking samples were selected out of their performances. The secondary data, nine speaking samples, of this study was collected out this group of 55 samples.

Because FC is an exam there are various assignments where the examinees produce speech i.e. show their speaking competence. Two of the situations were chosen to be looked at more closely for the purposes of the DIALANG project. In this study the tasks which the speakers fulfill are called Situation (1) and (2). In Situation (1) the examinees are asked to explain to a tourist what there is to see in their town and in Situation (2) they are asked to explain the difference between the types of various milks in Finland. All fifteen interviewees were interviewed in relation to Situation (1) and seven of them in relation to Situation (2), too. All in all, 22 interviews were conducted and recorded on tape.

Since the original reason why the data were being collected was to aid the DIALANG project to explore one of its aims - how to diagnose speaking proficiency - it was obvious that another assessment needed to take place. This time the 55 samples were all evaluated by *the same set of raters*. The evaluation of the examinees took place before this study in July 1998 and it was done by experienced raters who used the DIALANG assessment scale for overall speaking (see Appendix 2.). The DIALANG scale is an adaptation of Council of Europe's assessment scale (see *Modern Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. A Common European Framework of Reference*, 1995).

After the second evaluation, the samples of the examinees were analysed by a psychometric expert. The intention was to find out which samples could be taken as typical representatives of the DIALANG scale. This was achieved by looking for samples that had a very high level of agreement among the raters. In other words, the raters agreed on the level of the examinees' proficiency in speaking. The result was

that there were six speaking samples which corresponded to the DIALANG scale. Similarly to the Council of Europe's assessment scale, the DIALANG scale consists of six levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2 (A1 is the lowest level of proficiency and C2 the highest). This means that there were six speaking samples, which at this stage can be called the *elements* of the present thesis. Additional three speaking samples - one to the cut-off points (i.e. the border between two levels) of each level - were included in the secondary data. The simple reason behind this decision was to provide the interviewees with more stimuli, which in turn should produce interviews resulting with richer content: the richer the content the richer the results. Thus, finally there were nine elements to represent the DIALANG scale (see Table 1).

Table 1. The elements of the present study

DIALANG scale	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2			
ID number of the elements	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

3.3 The interview

In this study, the Grid interviews aim at producing constructs that the interviewees use to define speaking competence. The constructs take the form of bipolars, for example *rich-poor*. As mentioned above, the elements for the Grid interview in the present study are samples of spoken English. There are two separate sets of elements, due to the two situations 1 and 2. Both situations include nine elements which were

played to the interviewees in triads - three at the same time (cf. p. 28).

The order and the contents of the triads is the following:

1.triad: elements 1, 2 and 3.

2.triad: elements 4, 5 and 6.

3.triad: elements 7, 8 and 9.

4.triad: elements 1, 4 and 7.

5.triad: elements 2, 5 and 8.

6.triad: elements 3, 6 and 9.

7.triad: elements 1, 5 and 9.

8.triad: elements 2, 6 and 7.

9.triad: elements 3, 4 and 8.

The reason why the elements were represented to the interviewees in triads, was to compare them within one level, their own, and to compare them with elements of two other levels, so that each triad contains one element from all levels. This was done, once again, in order to get as much out of the interviewees as possible during the interviews when they were asked to compare the three elements of the triads. They were asked *only* to describe how two of them are similar and simultaneously different from the third and to indicate which one of the two descriptions they associate with good speaking competence. As explained above, the intent was to find various bipolars - for example fluent – not fluent - which reveal aspects of the interviewees' personal construct systems of speaking competence. It was hoped that the method would reveal both how they *personally* think that speaking competence is displayed and how they *construct that reality*.

The interviews were conducted and recorded by the present writer during October and November 1998. The interviews took place in the Centre for the Applied Language Studies and the actual physical

settings were typical for an interview: a quiet place, a tape recorder, an interviewee and an interviewer. The interviews varied in length, depending on how much the interviewees had to say, the shortest one took 30 minutes while the longest ones lasted up to one hour and ten minutes. Generally, it can be said that the first interviews lasted longer than the second interviews. During the interviews a special grid (Appendix 1 is an example of the grid) was filled in with the extracted bipolar constructs at the same time the interviewees produced them.

When all interviews were conducted, the elicited constructs were collected and thus all similar constructs could be combined. This categorisation was done according to Hasselgren's model of CLA, as much as the produced constructs allowed it to be done.

4 RESULTS

As explained earlier in this study, the scope of this study limits the presentation and analysis of results to the level of general description and discussion. This will be done in this section. Situation (1) will be discussed first and then Situation (2). The produced constructs under each category will also be presented in summary tables. The tables show the total number of how many interviewees mentioned each positive construct i.e. how many considered the positive definition of the bipolars as an indication of good speaking competence (No of +constructs by interviewees). It has to be made clear here that even though the interviewees usually produced same constructs more than once during the interviews, they were counted as one. The number of times each construct was produced is not significant in this study, since the aim is only to find different constructs, not to measure what each individual interviewee *emphasises* in speaking competence. Note also

that the positive definitions of the bipolars will usually be mentioned first and they will be graphically highlighted as in the following example, **rich - poor**. It is worth reminding here that in this study speaking competence is constructed of abilities, according to Hasselgren's model (see p.24-25), and that the contents of the abilities are derived from the data as combined and interpreted by the present writer .

4.1 Situation 1

The extracted constructs of Situation (1) will be described in the chapters below in the following order: 1. *microlinguistic ability* 2. *textual/discourse ability*, 3. *pragmatic ability*, 4. *strategic ability* and 5. *topic*.

4.1.1 Microlinguistic ability

On the basis of the data, microlinguistic ability can be divided into *vocabulary, syntactical competence and phonology and other prosodic features of speech*. The categories will be discussed in the following order: 1. *vocabulary*, 2. *syntactical competence* and 3. *phonology and other prosodic features of speech*.

Vocabulary

The extracted constructs dealing with vocabulary can be categorised under four headings: *quality of vocabulary, range of vocabulary, appropriacy of vocabulary* and *command of vocabulary*. As can be detected from the summary of vocabulary constructs (Table 2), the quality of vocabulary was mentioned most often and it was most elaborated on.

Within the category of *quality of vocabulary*, two constructs were mentioned clearly more often than the other four, namely **rich - poor** and

complex - simple vocabulary. This seems to indicate that many interviewees share the idea that a rich and more complex vocabulary indicates higher competence than poor and simple one. Two interviewees considered the use of abstract words and definitions more competent than the use of concrete words and definitions, as is the case with naming places and using detailed words. There was one interviewee who thought that using words that are generally less frequently used shows more competence than using words that are frequently used. Also, there was one interviewee who appreciated the fluent co-existence of Finnish and English words , as in *Lestiriver*.

Table 2. Summary of vocabulary constructs

Vocabulary	No of +constructs by interviewees
1. Quality of vocabulary:	
rich – poor	8
complex – simple	6
abstract words/definitions - concrete words/definitions	2
names of places and detailed words - no	2
less-frequent words – more-frequent words	1
Finnish and English words co-exist fluently in the vocabulary – no	1
2. Range of vocabulary:	
large – small	10
sufficient – insufficient	1
3. Appropriacy of vocabulary:	
vocabulary is suitable for the situation – no	3
uses words which convey the intended message – no	1
4. Command of vocabulary:	
good – bad	2

The single most often mentioned construct belongs to the *range of vocabulary*, and it indicates that the interviewees seem to consider a large vocabulary indicating higher competence than a small one. One interviewee referred to the range of vocabulary in terms of sufficient and insufficient vocabulary, too.

Four interviewees mentioned the *appropriacy of vocabulary*. Three of them considered how suitable the speakers' vocabulary was for the situation and thought this indicating competence: the more suitable the better. One interviewee also referred to the way speakers used words that convey the intended message to the listener and this, too, was thought to be an indication of better speaking competence than using words that did not convey the message.

Two interviewees introduced the *command of vocabulary*-category. According to them, a good command of vocabulary *as a whole* is a better indication of good lexical competence than a poor command of vocabulary.

Syntactical competence

The constructs under syntactical competence can be further divided into two separate categories: *quality of syntactical competence* and *range of grammatical structures*. As the following summary of responses on syntactical competence (Table 3) shows, quality of syntactical competence was mentioned more often than range of grammatical structures. Furthermore, its definitions were more variable than those of range.

There were two overwhelmingly popular constructs in the *quality of syntactical competence* (qualitative content). Nearly all interviewees brought up the issue of grammatically correct or incorrect speech. Also, a majority of them mentioned the degree of complexity of syntactical competence. These two constructs would suggest that the interviewees put much emphasis on the grammatical correctness and the complexity of syntactical competence as an indicator of speaking competence. Three interviewees mentioned that the ability to construct complete sentences shows a better competence than forming incomplete

sentences, while two mentioned that grammatical mistakes which hinder understanding show lack of competence.

There were two interviewees who dealt with particular grammatical items, specifically articles. According to them the use of articles is more competent than not using articles. The last three bipolars were mentioned only by one interviewee. One of them thought that repetition of grammatical structures shows lack of competence while not repeating shows competence. Another stated that fluent production of syntactical competence is an indication of competence in the syntactical field. A third interviewee considered the issue of being syntactically competent in general as a proof of speaking competence.

Table 3. Summary of syntactical constructs

Syntactical competence	No of +constructs by interviewees
1. Quality of syntactical competence:	
grammatically correct - incorrect	12
complex – simple	9
complete sentences – incomplete sentences	3
uses articles – no	2
grammatical mistakes hinder understanding – no	2
repetition of grammatical structures - no	1
fluent – no	1
competent – no	1
2. Range of grammatical structures:	
a lot – less	3
variable – no	2
wide variation of verbs - small variation of verbs	1
rich – poor	1

The second category under syntactical competence is *range of grammatical structures*. Three interviewees thought that a larger number of grammatical structures indicates better competence in the syntactical area than a smaller number of them. Two considered the range in terms of variation in the grammatical structures. They concluded that variable structure content is an indication of competence while no variation

shows lack of competence. The last two bipolars were both referred to by one interviewee. One of them considered that wide variation of verbs in particular, shows good competence in the syntactical area. The other interviewee defined the range of grammatical structures in terms of the nature of the structures. If they were *rich*, as the interviewee put it, the speakers expressed a higher level of competence in speaking than those speakers whose structures were *poor*.

Phonology and other prosodic features of speech

The two categories under phonology and other prosodic features of speech are: 1. *quality of pronunciation* and 2. *pronunciation, accent, intonation, stress and rhythm of the speech*. Quality has more definitions than the latter, but the latter was mentioned almost by everyone as can be seen from Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of phonological and prosodic constructs

Phonology and other prosodic features of speech	No of +constructs by interviewees
1. Quality of pronunciation: hinders understanding – does not hinder understanding understandable – no correct – incorrect	5 3 3
2. Pronunciation, accent, intonation, stress and rhythm of the speech: according to the target language – according to mother tongue	13

The fact that nearly all interviewees mentioned the second category seems to indicate that the interviewees regarded pronunciation and other prosodic features as a very important factor in speaking competence. Here the emphasis is on the ability to accommodate to the target language's prosodic features i.e. the speakers show lack of speaking competence if their pronunciation, accent, intonation, stress

and rhythm of speech are according to their mother tongue instead of the target language.

In the first category, which deals with the qualitative content of pronunciation, five interviewees shared the idea that speakers are competent if pronunciation does not hinder understanding them. The last two constructs were both mentioned by three interviewees. They all, in both bipolars, agreed on the notion that understandable pronunciation is an indication of a more competent speaker than not understandable pronunciation or that correct pronunciation indicates more competence than incorrect pronunciation.

4.1.2 Textual/Discourse ability

Based on the data it is possible to divide textual/discourse ability into four different categories: 1. *fluency*, 2. *quality of text/discourse*, 3. *quantity of text*, and 4. *textual features*. Out of the categories the qualitative content of text/discourse is the most elaborated one while fluency and quantity of text have only one - though strongly agreed upon - construct.

Fluency and quantity of text

As can be detected from Table 5, almost every interviewee of the 15 associated fluent speech and a large quantity of speech with competence in speaking. According to them, these two constructs seem to be fundamental features of speaking competence.

Table 5. Summary of fluency and quantity of text constructs

Fluency	No of +constructs by interviewees
text is fluent – text is not fluent	12

Quantity of text	No of +constructs by interviewees
a lot – less	13

Textual features

Textual features -category deals with the nature of the produced speech which can also be called text. The category consists of four constructs. One of them is quite clearly more often referred to than the others: eight interviewees saw descriptive use of language more competent than non-descriptive use of language. Two interviewees mentioned conversational speech a competent indication of speaking competence. Similarly, two interviewees thought that if speech resembles written text it shows lack of speaking competence. One interviewee saw speakers more competent when they managed to produce a story in their samples instead of not producing one. Table 6 presents a summary of textual features.

Table 6. Summary of textual features constructs

Textual features	No of +constructs by interviewees
text is a description – no	8
text is conversational – no	2
similar to spoken - similar to written	2
a story – no	1

Quality of text/discourse

Quality of text/discourse was described by many different definitions as can be seen from the summary (Table 7) below. The most often mentioned construct was that spontaneous and nativelike speech is considered as an indication of competence in speaking. Idiomatic use



of language was also an indication of competence in speaking according to seven interviewees which is only one interviewee less than the first construct. Six interviewees thought that understandable speech is competent speech.

Table 7. Summary of quality of text/discourse constructs

Quality of text/discourse	No of +constructs by interviewees
spontaneous and nativelike - no	8
idiomatic - no	7
understandable - no	6
repetitive - no	5
speed and/or rhythm of speech: fast - slow	5
natural flow of speech - no	5
hesitations - no	4
complex - simple	4
speech is an entity - no	3
language is used to communicate - no	2
break indicates search for words - no	2
natural breaks in speech - gaps as signals of searching for words, structures, what is going to say	
speech reflects non-verbal messages - no	1
few pauses - many pauses	1
speech and content divided into signifying units - no	1
grammatical, idiomatic and vocabulary mistakes - no	1
phrases - no	1

There are three constructs which were mentioned by five interviewees. They thought that repetition and slow speed and rhythm of speech is not competent while not repeating, fast speed and rhythm of speech and natural flow of speech is competent use of language. Four interviewees considered that hesitation in speech and simple speech indicate lack of speaking competence. Three interviewees referred to speech as an entity, as a whole, and thought that it was competent in the field speaking. Two interviewees mentioned that when language is used to communicate it shows speaking competence as well as when breaks are only indicators of search of words instead of something else for example hesitation. Contrary to this, one interviewee

thought that natural breaks in speech show more competent use of language than gaps that indicate search for words, structures and what the speakers are going to say.

The rest of the bipolars were each referred to by one interviewee. If speech accompanies non-verbal messages and if it contains few pauses, speech is considered more competent than when speech does not reflect any messages or it contains many pauses. Similarly, speech is competent when it is divided into signifying units i.e. semantic units and when speakers use phrases, while grammatical, idiomatic and vocabulary mistakes indicate otherwise.

4.1.3 Pragmatic ability

Pragmatic ability is divided into five sections: 1. *task accomplishment*, 2. *content*, 3. *speaker related features*, 4. *use of language as a whole*, and 5. *pragmatic strategies*. Content -category is defined in more ways than the other three.

Task accomplishment and use of language as a whole

There seems to be quite a strong agreement among the 15 interviewees that if speakers can fulfill and carry out the given assignment, they show competence in speaking (see Table 8). Use of language as a whole -category was defined only by one bipolar, as was task accomplishment -category, although the agreement among the interviewees was not as strong; five interviewees thought that if speakers use language as a whole they are competent speakers.

Table 8. Summary of task accomplishment and use of language constructs

Task accomplishment	No of +constructs by interviewees
fulfilling and completing the assignment – no	9

Use of language as a whole	No of +constructs by interviewees
competent – no	5

Content

The definitions of content given by the interviewees can be divided into three different categories: *quality*, *quantity* and *appropriacy of the content*. Of these, quality of the content contains most constructs (see Table 9). Two of the constructs were mentioned more often than the other six, namely rich - poor and informative - uninformative. Eight interviewees considered rich content more competent than poor content, likewise eight interviewees thought that informative content is more competent than uninformative content. According to the interviewees, these two constructs seem to be quite important in speaking competence.

Three interviewees described speaking competence more competent when the speakers gave alternatives and reasons to the listeners than when the speakers did not do so. Three bipolars were mentioned by two interviewees. They thought that complex content was competent use of language, similarly content dealing with abstract issues was related to good competence in speaking, and generally competent content was appreciated highly, too. There were two constructs which were named only once. One interviewee thought that if the content of speech was understandable, it signalled good speaking competence. According to other interviewee, speakers who dealt with

issues that the interviewee considered significant were competent speakers.

Table 9. Summary of content constructs

Content	No of +constructs by interviewees
1. Quality of content:	
rich – poor	8
informative – uninformative	8
gives alternatives and reasons to the listener – no	3
competent – incompetent	2
abstract issues – concrete issues	2
complex - simple	2
understandable - no	1
presents significant issues – no	1
2. Quantity of content:	
wide – limited	3
3. Appropriacy of content:	
independent and understandable without the context – no	3
relevant in relation to the context and the situation – no	2

Quantity of content was referred to by three interviewees who all thought that a broad content is a far better indication of competence in the field of speaking than a limited one. Five interviewees mentioned appropriacy of content. Three of them considered that speakers are competent when the content is independent and understandable without the context while two of them thought that speakers show competence when their contents are relevant to the context and the situation.

Speaker related features

Two different constructs were extracted in this category: self-confident and experienced communicator/speaker - no, and expressing own view / opinion - no (see Table 10). Seven interviewees thought it

Table 10. Summary of speaker related constructs

Speaker related features	No of +constructs by interviewees
self-confident and experienced communicator/speaker – no	7
expressing own view/opinion – no	3

important that speakers show self-confidence and experience in their speech: the more self-confident and experienced speaker the more competent in speaking. Two interviewees considered the expression of speaker's own views and opinions more competent than not expressing them.

Pragmatic strategies

The interviewees produced three different strategies belonging to this category (Table 11). Eleven interviewees thought that the use of any general audience awareness strategy was highly competent. Also, the use of politeness strategies was referred to as an indication of competence in speaking. There were two interviewees emphasized that using face-threatening acts shows lack of speaking competence.

Table 11. Summary of pragmatic strategies constructs

Pragmatic strategies	No of +constructs by interviewees
audience awareness – no	11
politeness strategies – no	6
face-threatening acts – no	2

4.1.4 Strategic ability

Strategic ability in this study consists of the communication strategies that the speakers use in the two assignments, or rather the strategies

which the interviewees interpret that they use (see Table 12). One strategy was clearly more often referred to than any other: self-repair.

Table 12. Summary of strategic ability constructs

Strategic ability	No of +constructs by interviewees
self-repair – no	4
uses compensation strategies - no	1
appropriate strategic start – no	1
uses appropriate expressions for filling in the gaps – no	1

Four interviewees mentioned that speakers who conduct self-repair are more competent than those who do not. The last two bipolars were both mentioned by one interviewee. One interviewee emphasized that if speakers use appropriate strategic starts, for example, suitable introduction sentences such as “*you want to know what there is to see in...*” in their speech they are competent language users. Another interviewee considered that the use of appropriate expressions for example “*you know*” to fill in the gaps of speech is a feature of competent speakers.

4.1.5 Topic

This category is rather small, since all in all seven interviewees described bipolars in relation to the actual topic of the speech (see Table 13). Two of them thought that if speakers mention more than one topic in their speech it is more competent than speaking of only one topic.

Table 13. Summary of topic constructs

Topic	No of +constructs by interviewees
quantity of topics: one – more than one	2
elaborating/specifying the topic – no	2
appropriate in the context – no	1
introduction of new topics – no	1
finishing the topic – no	1

Similarly two interviewees considered that the elaboration and specification of topic is a sign of more competent speakers than not elaborating and specifying. The last three constructs were each mentioned by one interviewee. One of them defined speakers as competent when their topic was appropriate in the context while one of the interviewees thought that the introduction of new topics shows more competence than not introducing new topics. Finally, one interviewee considered that speakers who can finish their topic are more competent than those who cannot.

4.2 Situation 2

Situation (2) is dealt with in the same order as Situation (1): 1. *microlinguistic ability*, 2. *textual/discourse ability*, 3. *pragmatic ability* and 4. *strategic ability*. The interviewees did not produce topic -category in this situation at all. Note that in this second situation there are 7 interviewees.

4.2.1 Microlinguistic ability

As in Situation (1), microlinguistic ability can be divided into three categories: *vocabulary*, *syntactical competence* and *phonology and*

other prosodic features. The categories will be discussed in similar order as in the above.

Vocabulary

On the basis of the data of the second situation, four categories can be distinguished. They are exactly the same as in Situation (1): *quality of vocabulary*, 2. *range of vocabulary*, 3. *appropriacy of vocabulary*, and 4. *command of vocabulary*. As can be detected from the summary of vocabulary constructs (Table 14), the categories are quite evenly defined by the interviewees.

Within the category of quality of vocabulary, one construct was mentioned by four interviewees, namely difficult - easy. They seem to prefer the more difficult words as an indication of speaking competence. Two interviewees considered the use of abstract and specific words more competent than the use of general words. Two other interviewees thought that using a vocabulary that is in general complex show more good speaking competence than using a simple vocabulary.

Contrary to Situation (1), the constructs belonging to range of vocabulary category are more varied: there are three separate bipolars instead of only one. Interviewees seem to consider a large vocabulary more competent than a small one, as in Situation (1), but they are also more specific in terms of their definitions. Two interviewees thought that variation in the range of vocabulary is more competent than no variation. Also, one interviewee mentioned the range of vocabulary in terms of sufficient and insufficient vocabulary for the task. In other words, if the vocabulary is sufficient for the given assignment according to the interviewee, then the speakers are competent speakers.

Table 14. Summary of vocabulary constructs

Vocabulary	No of +constructs by interviewees
1. Quality of vocabulary: difficult – easy	4
abstract and specific words – general words	2
complex - easy	2
2. Range of vocabulary: large – small	3
variation – no	2
sufficient for the task – insufficient	1
3. Appropriacy of vocabulary: suitable for the context – not suitable	1
4. Command of vocabulary: good - bad	1

The following two categories were mentioned only by one interviewee: the appropriacy of vocabulary and the command of vocabulary. One of these two considered the suitability of the vocabulary. If the speakers used suitable vocabulary they were more competent than those who did not. The other interviewee brought up the command of vocabulary- category. According to the interviewee a good command of vocabulary as a whole is one of the characteristics of good speaking competence.

Syntactical competence

In addition to *quality of syntactical competence* the second situation yielded two more categories: *quantity of grammatical mistakes* and *command of grammatical forms and structures*. As the following summary of syntactical competence (Table 15) shows, quality of syntactical competence was mentioned more often than the other two. Also, its definitions are more variable than those of quantity and command.

Table 15. Summary of syntactical competence constructs

Syntactical competence	No of +constructs by interviewees
1. Quality of syntactical competence: complex – simple	4
correct - incorrect	3
difficult – easy	2
logical and clear – no hinders understanding – does not hinder understanding	1
repetition - no	1
2. Quantity of grammatical mistakes: less - more	2
3. Command of grammatical forms and structures: competent – no	1

Similarly to Situation (1), many interviewees seem to agree that syntactically complex and correct language is an indicator of good speaking competence. Two interviewees mentioned that the degree of difficulty in syntax is a sign of competence in speaking: the more difficult forms and structures the better the competence. The last three bipolars were each mentioned by one interviewee. One thought that if syntactical product is logical and clear, it suggests that speakers are competent. Another referred to repetition of syntactical forms and structures and stated that it shows lack of speaking competence, while the third interviewee mentioned that if syntactical competence does not hinder the general understandability of speech, the speaker is competent.

There were two interviewees who dealt with the quantity of grammatical mistakes. According to them, speakers who produce a lot of grammatical mistakes are automatically less competent in the field of speaking than speakers who make mistakes less frequently. The last construct dealing with syntactical competence was mentioned only by one interviewee who considered that being generally competent in that area is one feature of competence in speaking.

Phonology and other prosodic features

The two categories under this section are *quality of pronunciation* and *pronunciation, accent, intonation, stress and rhythm of the speech* (see Table 16) as in Situation (1). Quality of vocabulary consists of only two bipolars. Both of them were mentioned by one interviewee according to whom the speakers are not competent if the quality of pronunciation needs to be improved or if it hinders the general understandability of the speech.

The fact that nearly all referred to the second category - as in the first situation - seems to indicate again that the interviewees consider pronunciation and other prosodic features of speech very important in speaking competence. As mentioned earlier in this study,

Table 16. Summary of phonology and prosodic constructs

Phonology and other prosodic features of speech	No of +constructs by interviewees
1. Quality of pronunciation: needs to be improved - does not need to be improved hinders understanding – does not hinder understanding	1 1
2. Pronunciation, accent, intonation, stress and rhythm of the speech: according to the target language – not according to the target language	6

the emphasis is on the ability to adopt the target language's prosodic features i.e. the speakers are less competent in speaking if their pronunciation, accent, intonation, stress and rhythm of speech are not according to the target language.

4.2.2 Textual/Discourse ability

In textual/discourse ability it is possible to distinguish the same four different categories as in Situation (1): 1. *fluency*, 2. *quality of text/discourse*, 3. *quantity of text*, and 4. *textual features*. Out of all the categories in this study, quality of text/discourse of Situation (2) was the most variously defined. There are many different bipolars that have been referred to only by one interviewee. Contrary to this, fluency and quantity of text have both only one construct which was mentioned almost by every interviewee.

Fluency and quantity of text

As can be seen from the summary (Table 17), each interviewee associated fluent speech with good competence in speaking. Almost as unanimous was their opinion on quantity: a large quantity of speech is a direct indication of competence in the field of speaking. According to the interviewees, these two definitions seem to be essential features of speaking competence.

Table 17. Summary of fluency and quantity of text constructs

Fluency	No of +constructs by interviewees
text is fluent – text is not fluent (7)	7

Quantity of text	No of +constructs by interviewees
a lot – less	6

Textual features

Textual features is a small category consisting of two constructs each described by one interviewee. One of them saw descriptive use of

language more competent than non-descriptive use of language while the other interviewee thought that speakers who bring up their own thoughts are more competent speakers than speakers who produce general descriptions. Following a summary of textual features (Table 18).

Table 18. Summary of textual features constructs

Textual features	No of +constructs by interviewees
general description – own thoughts	1
text is descriptive – no	1

Quality of text/discourse

This category is described by many different definitions as can be seen from the summary (Table 19) below. The produced constructs were quite specific i.e. many interviewees gave very specific and personal definitions which were not mentioned by any other interviewee. The number of these single definitions is much higher in this Situation (2) than in the first situation.

Four interviewees shared the idea that speakers who produce complete sentences are more competent speakers than those who produce incomplete sentences, phrases and thought. The same is true for the following construct: according to three interviewees, understandable speech is competent speech. Three interviewees thought that organised speech is more competent than unorganised while three other thought that informative speech is competent, too.

Table 19. Summary of quality of text/discourse constructs

Quality of text/discourse	No of +constructs by interviewees
complete sentences – incomplete sentences, phrases and thoughts	4
understandable - no	3
organised – no	3
informative – no	3
hesitations – less hesitations	2
learned phrases – spontaneous speech	2
advanced concepts - basic-level concepts	2
difficult - simple	2
specific expressions – vague expressions	2
speed of speech: fast – slow	2
complex - easy	1
communicative – no	1
points that hinder understanding – no	1
metatext – no	1
interactive – no	1
good – bad	1
coherent – no	1
repetitive – no	1
search for words – no	1
rapidity of speech can hinder understanding – no	1
semantic wholes – word lists	1

Six constructs were referred to by two interviewees. Two interviewees considered that hesitating and lower degree of difficulty in speech indicate lack of speaking competence. Two others mentioned that spontaneous speech is a better indication of competence in speaking than learned phrases. The use of advanced concepts and specific expressions was considered competent, too. Similarly, fast speed of speech was defined competent.

There are eleven constructs which each were mentioned by one interviewee. One of the interviewees thought that complex speech is competent speech. Another interviewee mentioned that when speakers use language to communicate they show good speaking competence as well as when they do not produce speech that contains points which hinder the general understandability of speech. Speech that included

metatext was considered competent speech, too. Interactive features in speech were also regarded as an indication of competence in speaking.

One interviewee defined the quality of text in terms of general level of speaking, either good or bad. According to this interviewee, if the quality was bad, it was a sign of lack in the field of speaking competence. Coherent speech was referred to show competence while repetition and search of words indicated lack of competence. Similarly, if the rapidity of speech hinders understandability, speech was considered not competent. The last bipolar suggests that speakers who use semantic wholes are more competent speakers than those whose production is similar to word lists.

4.2.3 Pragmatic ability

In Situation (2) pragmatic ability is divided into four categories: 1. *task accomplishment*, 2. *content*, 3. *speaker related features*, and 4. *pragmatic strategies*. Content is defined in more ways than the other two dimensions.

Task accomplishment

Here, as in the first situation, the category is defined by one bipolar: fulfilling the assignment - no (Table 20). The interviewees seem to appreciate it if speakers fulfill and complete the given assignment. The better they are in this function the better their competence in speaking.

Table 20. Summary of task accomplishment

Task accomplishment	No of +constructs by interviewees
fulfilling the assignment – no	4

Content

As in Situation (1), the interviewees divided content into three different categories: *quality*, *quantity* and *appropriacy of content*. Quality of the content contained a large number of constructs while the other two were defined by one bipolar (Table 21). One of the constructs of quality was mentioned almost by all interviewees, namely informative - uninformative. Six interviewees considered that informative content signals better competence than uninformative content. This suggests that informative content is quite an important factor in good speaking competence according to these interviewees.

Each of the seven remaining constructs was mentioned by one interviewee. One interviewee considered descriptive content more competent than subjective content, in other words content that is focused entirely on the speaker. Also, content that was highly concerning the assignment context of Situation (2) (i.e. high-context) was seen more competent than content that was not (i.e. low-context). One interviewee thought that if speakers gave recommendations, they were competent speakers. Another interviewee thought that complex content was competent use of language, similarly high degree of difficulty of the content was seen as indication of competent speaking, too. If speakers produced enough ideas according to the interviewee, they showed good competence in speaking while speakers who handled the assignment so that it resulted as a superficial content indicated poor level of competence.

Table 21. Summary of content constructs

Content	No of +constructs by interviewees
1. Quality of content:	
informative – no	6
descriptive – subjective (concentrating on the speaker)	1
high-context – low-context	1
recommendation – no	1
difficult – easy	1
complex – easy	1
superficial – no	1
enough ideas – not enough ideas	1
2. Quantity of content:	
a lot – less	1
3. Appropriacy of content:	
relevant in the situation - irrelevant	3

Quantity of content was referred to by one interviewee who thought that broad content is a better indication of competence in speaking than smaller amount of content. Three interviewees mentioned appropriacy of content and they all considered that speakers are more competent when the content is relevant to the situation in question than when the content appears to be irrelevant.

Speaker related features

This category contains more definitions in the second situation than in the first situation. The constructs were quite elaborated, i.e. many interviewees produced very specific bipolars which were not mentioned by any other interviewee. Two constructs were mentioned by two interviewees (see Table 22). They thought that speakers who are self-confident and show experience in their speech are competent speakers. When the interviewees defined speakers as natural they meant that their production of speech was quite close that of native speakers and it was considered more competent than speech that contained less native-like features.

The remaining six constructs were each described by one interviewee. One of them considered that speakers who expressed their own opinions were competent in speaking. Another interviewee thought that speakers who produce evaluative opinions of issues relating to the situation in question show more competence in their speaking ability than those speakers who produce plain descriptive speech. One interviewee mentioned how speakers display their language ability in general. If the ability was good, it was thought as an indication of good speaking competence, and if it was not good or 'poor' as the interviewee stated, it showed lack of competence.

Table 22. Summary of speaker related constructs

Speaker related features	No of +constructs by interviewees
natural speaker – no	2
self-confident and experienced speaker – no	2
expressing own opinion – no	1
judging speaker - describing speaker	1
expressing language ability: well – poorly	1
manages in the situation – no	1
comfortable in the situation – no	1
takes the assignment as a real-life situation - no	1

The last three bipolars deal with speakers in the actual situation. One interviewee thought that speakers who seem to manage in the situation in terms of their general speaking competence - i.e. who can use the appropriate words, grammatical structures and idiomatic phrases etc. - are more competent than those speakers who do not manage in the given situation. Another interviewee referred to how comfortable speakers are in the situation of the assignment: the more at ease the speaker seems to be in the situation the more competent the speaker. The last construct defined the way in which speakers relate to the assignment itself. It was considered a sign of good speaking

competence if speakers took the situation seriously i.e. took the assignment as it was a real-life situation.

Pragmatic strategies

In the second situation there was only one construct in this category (see Table 23). Three interviewees thought that using any general audience awareness strategy is an indication of good competence in speaking.

Table 23. Summary of pragmatic strategies constructs

Pragmatic strategies	No of +constructs by interviewees
audience awareness – no	3

4.2.4 Strategic ability

As was described in chapter (4.1.4), strategic ability consists of the strategies which the interviewees interpret that are used by the speakers (see Table 24). Similarly to Situation (1), one construct was clearly more often referred to than any other in this category: the use of introductory sentences. Almost every interviewee considered the use of this strategy a very good sign of speaking competence.

Table 24. Summary of strategic ability constructs

Strategic ability	No of +constructs by interviewees
uses introductory sentences – no	6
self-repair – no	2
interactional sensitivity – no	1
control of language: good – bad	1

Two interviewees mentioned that speakers who are able to conduct self-repair are more competent than those who are not able to use this strategy. One interviewee suggested that those speakers who show sensitivity in the situational interaction, i.e. are aware of how people behave in different kinds of interactional situations, are more competent than those speakers are not aware of this. The last bipolar was defined also by one interviewee who emphasized the general control of language as a whole. According to the interviewee, speakers who show that they have a good control of the language they produce are more competent than speakers who are not in control of their language.

To conclude the presentation of results, one final table (Table 25) will be presented to summarise the constructs extracted from the data of the present study.

Table 25. Summary of the constructs in Situations (1) and (2) (I = total number of interviewees, P = positive definitions)

SITUATION 1 (15 interviewees)		SITUATION 2 (7 interviewees)	
Microlinguistic ability			
vocabulary			
	I		I
1. Quality of vocabulary: rich – poor	8	1. Quality of vocabulary: difficult – easy	4
complex – simple	6	abstract and specific words – general words	2
abstract words/definitions - concrete words/definitions	2	complex - easy	2
names of places and detailed words - no	2		
less-frequent words – more-frequent words	1		
Finnish and English words co-exist fluently in the vocabulary – no	1		

(cont.)

2. Range of vocabulary: large – small sufficient – insufficient	10 1	2. Range of vocabulary: large – small variation – no sufficient for the task – insufficient	3 2 1
3. Appropriacy of vocabulary: vocabulary is suitable for the situation – no uses words which convey the intended message – no	3 1	3. Appropriacy of vocabulary: suitable for the context – not suitable	1
4. Command of vocabulary: good – bad	2	4. Command of vocabulary: good – bad	1
syntactical competence			
1. Quality of syntactical competence: grammatically correct - incorrect complex – simple complete sentences – incomplete sentences uses articles – no grammatical mistakes hinder understanding – no repetition of grammatical structures - no fluent – no competent – no	12 9 3 2 2 1 1 1	1. Quality of syntactical competence: complex – simple correct - incorrect difficult – easy logical and clear – no hinders understanding –does not hinder understanding repetition - no	4 3 2 1 1 1
2. Range of grammatical structures: a lot – less variable – no wide variation of verbs - small variation of verbs rich – poor	3 2 1 1	2. Quantity of grammatical mistakes: less - more	2
		3. Command of grammatical forms and structures: competent – no	1
phonology and other prosodic features of speech			
1. Quality of pronunciation: hinders understanding – does not hinder understanding understandable – no correct – incorrect	5 3 3	1. Quality of pronunciation: needs to be improved - no hinders understanding – no	1 1
2. Pronunciation, accent, intonation, stress and rhythm of the speech: according to the target language – according to mother tongue	13	2. Pronunciation, accent, intonation, stress and rhythm of the speech: according to the target language – not according to the target language	6
Textual/Discourse ability			
fluency			
text is fluent – text is not fluent	12	text is fluent –text is not fluent	7
quality of text/discourse			
spontaneous and nativelike - no idiomatic - no understandable - no repetitive – no speed and/or rhythm of speech: fast – slow natural flow of speech - no hesitations – no complex - simple	8 7 6 5 5 5 4 4	complete sentences – incomplete sentences, phrases and thoughts understandable - no organised – no informative – no hesitations – less hesitations learned phrases – spontaneous speech advanced concepts - basic-level concepts difficult - simple	4 3 3 3 2 2 2 2

(cont.)

speech is an entity – no	3	specific expressions – vague expressions	2
language is used to communicate – no	2	speed of speech: fast – slow	2
break indicates search for words - no	2	complex - easy	1
natural breaks in speech - gaps as signals of searching for words, structures, what is going to say	2	communicative – no	1
speech reflects non-verbal messages – no	1	points that hinder understanding – no	1
few pauses – many pauses	1	metatext – no	1
speech and content divided into signifying units – no	1	interactive – no	1
grammatical, idiomatic and vocabulary mistakes – no	1	good – bad	1
phrases – no	1	coherent – no	1
		repetitive – no	1
		search for words – no	1
		rapidity of speech can hinder understanding – no	1
		semantic wholes – word lists	1
quantity of text			
	1		1
a lot – less	13	a lot – less	6
textual features			
	1		1
text is a description – no	8	general description – own thoughts	1
text is conversational – no	2	text is descriptive – no	1
similar to spoken - similar to written	2		
a story – no	1		
Pragmatic ability			
task accomplishment			
	1		1
fulfilling and completing the assignment – no	9	fulfilling the assignment – no	4
content			
	1		1
1. Quality of the content:		1. Quality of content:	
rich – poor	8	informative – no	6
informative – uninformative	8	descriptive – subjective (concentrating on the speaker)	1
gives alternatives and reasons to the listener – no	3	high-context – low-context	1
competent – incompetent	2	recommendation – no	1
abstract issues – concrete issues	2	difficult – easy	1
complex - simple	2	complex – easy	1
understandable - no	1	superficial – no	1
presents significant issues – no	1	enough ideas – not enough ideas	1
2. Quantity of the content:		2. Quantity of content:	
wide – limited	3	a lot – less	1
3. Appropriacy of content:		3. Appropriacy of content:	
independent and understandable without the context – no	3	relevant in the situation - irrelevant	3
relevant in relation to the context and the situation – no	2		

(cont.)

speaker related features			
	1		1
self-confident and experienced communicator/speaker – no	7	natural speaker – no	2
expressing own view/opinion – no	3	self-confident and experienced speaker – no	2
		expressing own opinion – no	1
		judging speaker - describing speaker	1
		expressing language ability: well – poorly	1
		manages in the situation – no	1
		comfortable in the situation – no	1
		takes the assignment as a real-life situation – no	1
use of language as a whole			
	1		
competent – no	5		
pragmatic strategies			
	1		1
audience awareness – no	11	audience awareness – no	3
uses politeness strategies – no	6		
face-threatening acts – no	3		
Strategic ability			
	1		1
self-repair – no	4	uses introductory sentences – no	6
uses compensation strategies - no	1	audience awareness – no	3
appropriate strategic start – no	1	self-repair – no	2
uses appropriate expressions for filling in the gaps – no	1	interactional sensitivity – no	1
		control of language: good – bad	1
Topic			
	1		
one topic – more than one	2		
elaborating/specifying the topic – no	2		
appropriate in the context – no	1		
introduction of new topics – no	1		
finishing the topic – no	1		

5 DISCUSSION

The general conclusion of this study is that the rating constructs extracted in the situations are quite similar. Of course, there are differences, but they are situated in the definitions of the constructs rather than in the division of abilities. Some of the constructs were mentioned only by one interviewee thus making them more specific and personal in nature in the second situation, for example in quality of

text/discourse. This could be due to the fact the interviewees were interviewed twice. So, in the second interview they possibly were able to delve deeper in their own personalized idea of speaking. Another explanation could be that the assignments of the secondary data are different in nature and in their focus.

There is one difference in the division of abilities: the topic. In Situation (2), no interviewee defined the topic in any way, while in the first situation there were seven interviewees who described constructs dealing with the topic of the situation. There seems to be quite a logical explanation for the exclusion of topic in the second situation, namely the characteristics of the assignment. In Situation (1) the speakers were instructed to explain to a tourist what there is to see in her/his town, and in Situation (2) the speakers were asked to explain the difference between the various types of milk in Finland. The difference between the assignments means that the first situation is focused on description of the content, and the second situation on interaction. In other words, in the first situation the content of the assignment is important and thus it is left open while in the second situation the focus is on the actual oral interaction - thus a limited content - i.e. how speakers manage to explain and convey the needed information to the listener. In this light the results make perfect sense and seem logical.

At first glance, the results suggest that there are several areas upon which interviewees seemed to be agreeing more strongly than upon other areas: these are fluency, quantity of text and task accomplishment. In both situations these features of speaking were defined uniformly almost by each interviewee. Since the findings are similar, one can suggest that these features of speaking are essential in foreign language speaking competence; fluent speaker who produces a lot of spoken text and who fulfills given assignments is a competent speaker of foreign language according to the three group of subjects in

this study. Of course, this general and commonsense conclusion is not the whole story. The results also suggest that there are other indicators of speaking competence. These will be discussed ability by ability below.

Microlinguistic ability seems to be quite an important factor in speaking competence. As the results show, it is divided into three sections which contain the largest number of constructs in this study. This would suggest that microlinguistic ability is a very significant part of speaking competence. The more uniformly agreed upon features of microlinguistic ability might be taken as a relevant indicator of good speaking competence. These include rich and complex vocabulary, large range of vocabulary, grammatical correctness and complexity, and pronunciation and other prosodic features that are produced aiming at the target language's norms.

Textual/discourse ability is also an important competence in speaking, after all, the above mentioned fluency and quantity of text are included in this ability. In addition to the two categories, there are other features that many interviewees considered important, thus indicating that they are significant features in speaking. The interviewees seemed to think that speakers who produce speech that is spontaneous and nativelike, idiomatic, understandable, not repetitive, fast rather than slow and that flows naturally, are competent speakers. So are those whose production is descriptive rather than non-descriptive.

Pragmatic ability is yet another important ability. It includes task accomplishment which seems to be a relevant feature of speaking competence in test situations. The content of speech becomes important in test situations, too. The interviewees quite unanimously agreed that rich and informative content that is appropriate for the situation is a sign of good speaking competence. Also, the interviewees seemed to consider that speakers who show self-confidence and experience in

their speech are better speakers than those who are unable to show these characteristics. The interviewees seemed to quite unanimously appreciate highly any strategies that show audience awareness in their speech. They also had a high regard for speakers who use politeness strategies: the more these strategies are used the better the speaker.

Strategic ability seemed quite important, too. The use of introductory sentences and self-repair were considered to be good indicators of speaking competence.

The last ability of the first situation, topic, seemed to be less important factor in speaking competence according to the interviewees, but it could be used in some borderline cases when raters are trying to decide between two grades. If speakers appear to be able to deal with more than just one topic and if they can elaborate the topic, they could be given a higher assessment than those who are unable to do these things.

In sum, this study suggests, that good speaking competence consist of features of microlinguistic, textual/discourse, pragmatic and strategic abilities, more precisely it consists of good command of these abilities. A good speaking competence appears to consists of the most significant constructs of this study, according to which speech could be assessed in a test situation. Thus, the main research question of the present study - the provision of an empirically-derived set of criteria defining of good speaking competence - can now be answered. The criteria are summarized in Table 26 below:

Table 26. Definitions of good speaking competence

Microlinguistic ability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rich and complex vocabulary • wide range of vocabulary • grammatical correctness and complexity • pronunciation and other prosodic features of speech resemble that of the target language's as closely as possible
Textual/discourse ability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fluent speech • a large quantity of text • produced speech is spontaneous and nativelike <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • produced speech is idiomatic • produced speech is easily understandable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the speed of speech is fast • the speech avoids repetition • the speech flows naturally • the speech is descriptive
Pragmatic ability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • successful task accomplishment • the content of the speech is rich • the content of the speech is informative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the content is appropriate • the speaker shows signs of self-confidence in the speech • the speaker shows signs of experience in the speech • the speaker is aware of the audience and shows it <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the speaker uses politeness strategies
Strategic ability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the speaker uses introductory sentences • the speaker conducts self-repair

Carefulness concerning the categorisation of this study was a major concern. Since the interviews were taped, it was possible to listen to them many times. This made the present writer aware of the fact that interviewees shared many ideas of speaking competence. Thus the categorisation appeared relatively straightforward. Even though no major problems were experienced in the categorisation, it must be emphasized that the categorization of the constructs is *solely* the interpretation of the present writer, someone else might suggest a somewhat different categorisation.

The fact that there are *two* situations which are similar (their goal was to assess speaking), yet different in their focus, adds the generalizability of the findings. Since the situations can be regarded as good representatives of any average speaking test assignment, the results of this study possibly can be applied to similar speaking situations. There is yet another aspect which suggests that the results could be applied even further, namely the number of the interviewees. The number of interviewees is quite large which points to a certain generalizable value of this present thesis. Even though the generalizability of the results seems promising, it is important to remember, however, that the generalizability can be referred *first and foremost to other similar groups of people* as the subject groups in this study.

The two situations can be considered good representatives of speaking test assignments, and it can be expected that they are appropriate and *valid* in indicating speaking proficiency. Assessing criteria for speaking proficiency with the Grid technique proved quite feasible, and affirms the value of the Repertory Grid technique.

One reason why the findings of the present study are quite clear-cut is that the interviewees had to produce bipolars. They had to

decide which definition of the bipolar they considered better i.e. characteristics of good speaking competence. This could be one object of criticism in this study: it could be seen as limiting the interviewees freedom of expression. However, this shortcoming can be excused since the goal was to find *a clear set of criteria* for assessing speaking competence, and it cannot be done unless the interviewees express their opinion *definitely*. Nevertheless, an issue that should be discussed in relation to the production of bipolars is the actual definition for example *good* vocabulary, *complex* syntactical competence etc. Since people use definitions to build up criteria, it is important to take the matter of defining them under discussion. Since the results seem to be quite well interpreted within the theoretical framework of this study, it suggests also that the interpretations of the present writer are valid. Thus the various elements form a chain of argument which tends to affirm the claim of validity.

This study was not able to address the actual meanings underlying the constructs produced by the interviewees, simply because of the limited scope of the study. One could suggest that the produced constructs are generally accepted and shared values concerning speaking competence in the surrounding society and that each participant of the same society learns and acquires them. But is this notion right, and if it is, who originally has defined these evaluative constructs? Is it the educational system which gradually feeds every pupil the idea what is good language and speaking competence like? Or is it the media, our parents or all things combined?

The most logical answer to the questions above could be that the surrounding society gives the general framework of the values and then people adjust it according to their own experiences. However, this does not eliminate the difficulty of defining definitions. In order to say something definite about the nature of the definitions in this study, it

would require a separate study concentrating only on them, and exploring them in a different research set-up and framework. This study provides only a general description of the characteristics of proficient speaking skills in foreign language as interpreted by both the interviewees - with the help of a particular interpretative grid - and the present writer with the limitations provided by the context i.e. surrounding physical society and time.

This study could also be extended by exploring in more detail the constructs according to the interview group that produced them. There could be some differences in the way the experienced English raters, English experts and non-English raters have constructed their concept of speaking competence. One hypothesis to explore could be that there would not be many differences between the groups of the raters, rather the differences would most probably exist between the English experts and the two other groups. One could also suggest that there would not be any significant differences after all each group consists of people who share a common interest: languages. Therefore, one extension could be to interview people who are not language-oriented to the same degree as the subjects in this study are and compare the findings. It seems quite possible that there would be significant differences which could give more insight into speaking competence. Also, another extension could be to interview, this time, native speakers and native speaking raters, and compare their produced constructs with the findings of the present thesis.

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APPENDIX 2. DIALANG assessment scale for overall speaking of July 1998

PUHUMINEN

6

Pystyy tuottamaan selkeää, sujuvaa, hyvin rakennettua puhetta, jossa on toimiva looginen rakenne, joka auttaa vastaanottajaa havaitsemaan ja muistamaan tärkeitä asioita. Pystyy keskustelemaan helposti ja asiaankuuluvasti ja osallistumaan kohdekielellä täysipainoisesti sosiaalisen ja henkilökohtaisen alueen elämään ilman minkäänlaisia kielellisiä rajoituksia.

5

Pystyy esittämään selkeitä, yksityiskohtaisia kuvauksia ja esityksiä kompleksisista aiheista, liittämään aiheisiinsa alateemoja, kehittämään edelleen joitakin keskeisiä seikkoja (sekä täydentämään esityksensä sopivalla lopetuksella). Pystyy käyttämään kieltä joustavasti ja tehokkaasti sosiaalisiin tarkoituksiin, kuten emotionaalisiin ja vihjaileviin tarkoituksiin ja leikinlaskuun.

4

Pystyy esittämään selkeitä, yksityiskohtaisia kuvauksia ja esityksiä hyvinkin erilaisista aiheista, jotka liittyvät häntä kiinnostaviin alueisiin, sekä pystyy laajentamaan ja tukemaan esittämiään asioita lisäseikoilla ja asiaan liittyvillä esimerkeillä. Pystyy ylläpitämään suhteita (syntyperäisiin) puhujiin ilman, että tahattomasti huvittaa tai ärsyttää heitä.

3

Pystyy suhteellisen sujuvasti esittämään lineaarisena asioiden luettelona yksinkertaisen kuvauksen jostakin itseä kiinnostavasta aiheesta. Pystyy ylläpitämään keskustelua tai asian käsittelyä, mutta häntä voi joskus olla vaikea ymmärtää, kun hän pyrkii sanomaan täsmällisesti mitä tarkoittaa.

2

Pystyy antamaan yksinkertaisen kuvauksen tai esityksen ihmisistä, elin- tai työskentelyolosuhteista, arkipäivän rutiineista, mieltymyksistä tai vastenmielisyyksistä jne. lyhyenä sarjana yksinkertaisia ilmauksia, joista muodostuu luettelo. Pystyy osallistumaan rutiininomaisissa yhteyksissä lyhyisiin keskusteluihin itseään kiinnostavista asioista.

1

Pystyy tuottamaan yksinkertaisia, yleensä irrallisia ilmauksia ihmisistä ja paikoista / perustason tervehdyksiä ja hyvästelyilmauksia.