

**The effect of task type on the assessment of
grammatical competence in oral proficiency tests.**

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of task type on the linguistic output produced in an oral proficiency test situation, with particular reference to grammatical forms and the functions/meanings they realise.

Two tasks were designed for use with paired test candidates. Although both tasks can be said to fall within the communicative paradigm as they are interactive in nature and, to some extent, reflect real-world communicative situations, they differ in that one is an information/opinion gap activity with a focused communicative goal, whereas the other is an open-ended discussion task.

The tasks were aimed at students of upper-intermediate/advanced level. Language proficiency at this level is often measured by means of a criterion-referenced scale which consists of statements (band descriptors) about performance. The top end of the scale usually corresponds with what test developers consider to be an 'educated' native speaker performance.

The two tasks were therefore given to a sample of both native and non-native speakers of English under simulated test conditions. The subsequently transcribed data was then analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively to determine if and why certain grammatical structures are more likely to be elicited from one task or the other.

The results suggest that there does appear to be a difference in linguistic output between the two tasks, and that this may well have implications for both the testing and the teaching of spoken English.

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