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Task Handling Competences in English

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It is our claim that assessing an individual's communicative competence requires us to consider not only language resources –what one has, but also task handling—what one can do. The term "task" is used here in a very broad sense, referring to any "real-life" doing in a social context. In fact, individuals interact with each other, performing a series of real-life tasks, and "a society" can be defined as a complex of interactions, or as a set of tasks to be performed through interaction. It is, in fact, possible to think of social realities with respect to a set of tasks, because as a social man, it is inevitable for an individual to handle incessant tasks, and in the handling of tasks, one lives in social realities.

Verbal Tasks in Real-life Situations

In this paper, we thus use "task" in the broadest sense of the term. One but critically important restriction on the definition is the use of language—or the target language. This entails that all tasks we are concerned with will be carried out verbally, thus being "verbal tasks" or language-using tasks, and placed within the context of communication. Thus, doing push-ups 30 times a day may well be a task of some kind, but it is not the task we are concerned with here. But asking someone to do push-ups 30 times a day or reporting that you do push-up 30 times a day are verbal tasks. Language functions as discussed in paper 5 can be the names of real-life tasks.

A note should be made here that classroom tasks may be either real-life tasks or "pedagogical tasks" (the Common European Framework, 2001:31), depending on the authenticity of tasks to be performed. School can be taken as a real-life community and education can be conceived of as a process of living. In this context, many classroom tasks are authentic, real-life tasks in themselves. However, we tend to think that we help learners develop communicative competence in English by letting them do a series of pedagogical tasks such as gap-filling exercises and sentence merging exercises (Yule 1997, Yoshida and Yanase 2003, Littlewood 1981).

Many verbal tasks (henceforth, simply "tasks") are goal-oriented, having their goals to be achieved, and for some of those tasks, people are consciously aware of the nature of the tasks, saying "I have a thing to do." There are also tasks of everyday routines such as greeting, gossiping, asking for directions, and reminding, which are not usually inter-subjectively perceived as "tasks," although we consider them verbal tasks of ordinary kinds. Some tasks are broad in their scope, consisting of a number of sub tasks.

Task Characterization

We face countless tasks every day, such as the task of complaining about a purchased product, the task of bargaining the price of a car, the task of asking a banker to finance, the task of explaining a new product, the task of making a paper presentation at a conference, and so on. It is not possible in practice to list all the possible tasks we face, yet it is feasible to sample tasks representative of a given developmental stage in order to assess how functionally an individual can handle a given task(s). Also, the number of tasks would be countless, yet a set of criteria for characterizing each task within a given developmental stage would remain relatively simple. For example, the following simple scheme would work for the purpose of classifying different tasks:

Task

Overall Judgment	Easy	<1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7→	Difficult
	Simple	<1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7→	Complicated
	Familiar	<1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7→	Unfamiliar
	Prepared	<1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7→	Spontaneous
	Procedural	<1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7→	Creative

Basically, we are concerned with whether or not a task is easy to handle. Some tasks are perceived to be relatively difficult, while others, relatively simple. Tasks of everyday routines are generally taken for granted, and, hence, perceived as being relatively "easy" and natural to carry out. However, this is valid only for those who use English as their native language, and there is no guarantee that the same goes for the learners of English. Thus, this dimension of "easy to difficult" requires a subjective overall judgment, which may differ easily according to who makes this judgment. Even among learners of English, there might be individual differences in terms of the judgment about the perceived difficulty of, for example, the task of declining an offer politely.

The remaining four dimensions are relatively immune to the subjective "sway" in making a judgment. The dimension of "simple to complicated" can be straightforwardly applied to the problem of differentiating between simple tasks and complicated tasks. For example, the task of filling in a form, or telling day, time of day and date is simple, whereas the task of encouraging a person who is depressed is rather complicated, though the difference between the two is a matter of degree. To determine the degree of complexity, we may count the number of action steps involved to carry out the task in question.

As an example of a complicated task, let us look at a hypothetical case in which a Japanese expert P in the field of waste disposal was dispatched to Malaysia as an advisor. The following is one of the scenes P encountered:

<Sample Task[very complicated]>

Place at a conference room in the City Hall of Kuala Lumpur

Purposes (1) to discuss a research report prepared by P about the status quo of waste disposal, and some suggestions for improvement, (2) and to prepare an action plan

In the Meeting Malaysian counterparts with different cultural backgrounds say frank opinions and ask straight questions about the P's report; P responds to their comments and questions spontaneously and honestly; the tone of their interaction is rather formal; P plays dual roles here, being both the chairperson and the presenter of the report.

Agenda Current Issues in the prevailing method of waste disposal management

↓

P's Proposal about a more effective method

↓

Examination of the proposal for a better framework

↓

Role Assignment for completing an action plan to be submitted to the city government

Linguistic Features The purpose of this meeting is to improve the draft prepared by Japanese expert P in such a way as to make the draft more acceptable in the cultural context of Malaysia. P's task here is reporting what he has prepared, and chairing the meeting. Thus, both presentation and chairing skills are required to carry out this task. Also, P needs to elicit constructive opinions about the clarity and the organization of the document. For this, P should have the ability to negotiate opinions, which are different and sometimes conflicting among the participants. Since the participants' cultural backgrounds include Malay, Chinese, and Indian, constant negotiations of meaning are required to make the interaction functional. P's attitudes are: formal, enthusiastic, polite, agreeable, complementary, and confident. The partners' attitudes are: welcoming, courteous, enthusiastic, frank, and respectful. The verbal interaction in the meeting consists of speech acts such as explaining, confirming, suggesting, agreeing, disagreeing, requesting, promising.

Japanese expert P plays the role of a professional advisor, and his way to give feedback to the Malaysian counterparts becomes an important element in handling this task functionally. P will often find it necessary to point out the problems with what the counterpart says. The act of pointing out the other's problem could be taken as a criticism, which might have negative effects on the interpersonal relationship. Thus, P will give an affectively positive feedback (e.g., appreciating the partner's effort), and then a cognitively negative feedback (i.e., pointing out the problem). If affectively positive tones dominate, the partner will be more willing to accept negative comments, and to give it another try. In the dynamics of interpersonal communication, the affective domain is universally dominant, and in a situation where affective approval is not obtained, communication is unlikely to be promoted. Affective feedback is often carried nonverbally through gestures, facial expressions, and voice tones.

Thus, the task introduced here involves a number of speech acts, and is undeniably a complicated one, requiring both high professional expertise and high communicative language competence.

Now, the dimension of familiarity is also straightforward. Cognitive load may be lessened according to the degree of the language user's familiarity with the task in question. For a given person, it is easy to judge whether a task is familiar or unfamiliar. This dimension has something to do with the person's field of specialization. For a linguist, the task of explaining the functions of the present perfect form is a familiar one, though most people will judge it to be an unfamiliar task.

The dimension of "prepared to spontaneous" is an important one in characterizing tasks. One can get prepared when one makes a paper presentation at an international conference. Speeches at informal parties are mostly made spontaneously. For a prepared task, one can in advance rehearse what one will actually say on the occasion, and simulate what strategies might be effective for the task.

The dimension of "procedural to creative" is the one we would like to emphasize particularly here. For some tasks, there are standard procedures one can follow; for others, one must "play it by ear" using imagination, because one cannot anticipate what will happen in the next scene. Procedural tasks are predictable, while creative tasks are unpredictable.

In other words, for procedural tasks, there are “tacit scripts” about the verbal behaviors, which are assumed to be shared by the participants. For example, the task of making a presentation or the task of chairing a meeting basically follow certain procedural steps, and skillful presenters or chairpersons have scripts about those steps. The notion of “script” is integral part of what is called “communication skill,” which will be defined as follows:

Definition of communication skill

“To have a communication skill” means to have a valid script to carry out a given speech act, plus the ability to verbally realize the script.

Here let us note that communication skills are required for handling verbal tasks, yet “the name of a task” and “the name of a skill” can be the same. For example, “presentation” can be both the name of a task and the name of a skill.

Presentation

- the name of a communication skill to be employed
- the name of a task to be performed

Suppose that someone say, “I'm going to make a presentation about our new project tomorrow.” We assume that the person is going to do “a presentation task,” and in order to do so effectively, he or she needs to have “a presentation skill.” We call this “skill employment” or employing a communication skill to handle a task.

Now, in the following conversational transaction, person A worries about person B's health, and attempts to talk B into quitting smoking:

A: You know … I noticed that you've been smoking a lot lately. I really think you should quit. If you continue smoking like that, you are going to get sick, and I don't want you to get sick. I'm worried about your health.

B: I wish I could quit smoking. But I've been smoking for 10 years. It would be too difficult for me to quit.

A: I know it'll be hard on you, but there are many people who did it after many years of smoking. So, why don't you try to quit smoking?

B: Thanks for your concern. I think you've got a point. I will try to quit smoking.

A: Good! You'll be glad you did.

This is just a sample of naturally flowing conversation, yet even here there seems to be an underlying script, of which the participants are not probably aware:

SCRIPT ANALYSIS

A: Urging B to quit smoking, explaining the reason why.

B: Disagreeing with A

A: Still continuing persuading B to stop smoking

B: Accepting A's persuasion

A: Assuring B's judgment is a correct one

Thus, even in transactions of spontaneous conversation, we often follow tacit scripts of verbal actions.

Thus, we sample representative tasks for each developmental stage, and characterize them using the scheme as explained above. Then, we are able to ask which tasks a learner is able to handle functionally. This question is the essence of what we call "task handling competences."

In order to be more specific about the notion of "script," we would like to focus on three related concepts—"script," "frame," and "move" in the next section.

Action Script: Script, Frame and Move

Thus, tasks can be of various kinds. We are concerned with verbal tasks or language-using tasks. From the viewpoint of assessing task handling competences, "what tasks are being handled in what way" becomes the critical question. In terms of "what tasks," we can characterize them using the scheme proposed above. The question of "in what way" still remains to be answered in such a way as to help devising a measure of assessing task handling competences. The key to this question rests on the concept of "predictability." If the question of "what to do and say in a task" is predictable to a certain degree, then we can assume the "action script" for the task. And then, the language user's task handling competences will be assessed in a significant way with respect to the ability to employ a communication skill necessary to carry out a task; once again, to have a communication skill means to have both an effective script to carry out a given speech act and the ability to verbally realize the script.

Predictability of Verbal Acts

Script knowledge is part of our common knowledge; it has something to do with predictability. For example, with the script of buying a train ticket, we can anticipate what actions to follow to attain the goal. In a restaurant scene, we can easily expect a series of actions a customer will take: entering a restaurant, sitting at a table, making an order, eating and drinking (eating soup, the main course, and dessert), and paying the bill and leaving the restaurant. Here we observe a coherent sequence of actions, and yet, all these actions can be considered separate actions because they all involve different objects. From these actions, we can also anticipate what verbal transactions tend to occur, or what expressions are conventionally used.

The using of a language in social transactions is, generally speaking, a goal-oriented behavior. And in many cases, goal-oriented verbal acts follow conventional scripts—scripts shared by language users in general, thus being predictable to some degree. A script is an ordered sequence of actions appropriate to a particular context, organized around a goal. For instance, let us look at the opening statement by a chairperson of a meeting:

Chairperson: Ladies and Gentlemen. May I have your attention, please? We are here today to discuss how to help our students acquire English in a classroom setting. As you know, most language teachers realize there always exists a tremendous gap between classroom English and so-called "authentic English." The main purpose of this meeting is then to explore possible techniques to bridge the gap between the two.

Here, the chairperson, as we expect, starts the meeting, introduces the general topic, explains its background, and then, shows the specific points of discussion. These acts are verbally realized using conventional expressions as follows:

Ladies and Gentlemen	→Opening the meeting
We are here today to	→Introducing the general topic
As you know	→Explaining its background
The main purpose of this meeting is to	→Showing the specific point of discussion

This is a conventional way of starting a formal meeting, following the shared action script.

People have countless action scripts, and social interactions are largely dependent upon the realization of those scripts. In general, behaviors within a script can be considered permissible social acts, and in fact, a stretch from the script can be a marker of a person's characteristic. Our minds can stretch limitlessly, yet our behavior far beyond the script becomes the target of social sanctioning as "aberration." People cannot look inside a person's mind, yet they can observe what the person does – verbally or nonverbally. Thus, it is obvious from the outside whether or not a behavior accords with the expected script, and depending on the degree of stretch, the behavior receives positive, neutral, or negative feedback.

The concept of "cross-cultural differences" can be understood in terms of cultural-relevance of tasks; some tasks are not relevant to a given culture, or in terms of the validity of their scripts, some scripts are invalid in some cultures. In other words, there are culture-specific tasks, and culture-specific scripts, as well as inter-culturally common tasks and inter-culturally valid scripts. With this in mind, we consider that a person is communicatively skillful, if the person has valid scripts to carry out specific speech acts and the ability to verbally realize the scripts.

For example, consider the task of informing an applicant to a job opening of the fact that you cannot hire him. The expected script will include the following flow of verbal information:

Action script

Thanking for his application to the company;
Informing politely that you are not able to hire him;
Giving the reason(s) for not being able to hire him;
Thanking again for his interest in your company

This script will be verbally realized, and the following will be a result:

Verbalization of the Action script

Thank you for your application to our company. We regret that we are unable to invite you for further interviews. We have had a large number of applicants whose background and experience fit the position requirements more nicely. Thank you again for your interest in ABC company.

As for this specific task, probably there will be no marked cultural differences in the content of the working script between America and Japan, for example. However, what about the following verbal interaction between A and B?

A: Mr. Brown, I have something to talk to you about.

B: Sure. What can I do for you?

A: Well, I'd like to ask for a raise. You see, I've worked here for almost 5 years. I have a pretty good record. I've never received a raise before. Frankly speaking, I need a raise, and I think I deserve one.

B: I see. Have you missed any work?

A: No. I've never been late for work, either.

B: Well, that's impressive. But the problem is that I've already reviewed everyone's salary for this month. I tell you what. Why don't you come back to discuss it in 3 weeks?

A: That'll be October 3rd. But could you guarantee that I'll receive a raise.

B: Yes. You'll have my recommendation.

A: All right. Thank you so much. I'll see you on October 3rd.

Here, both A and B are assumed to be Americans. For A, the task is asking for a raise in his salary. The exchange here basically follows the script below:

Action script

A: Asking for a raise in his salary
   Justifying his proposal

B: Explaining the status quo
   Suggesting an alternative

A & B: Reaching the consensus

The task itself would be inter-culturally common, and yet the way to handle this task may be different in Japan. In the case above, A gets to the point straight by saying "I'd like to ask for a raise." A gives his justification for asking a raise by telling the facts without being condescending. His boss reacts by commenting on the given facts and explaining his situation. At the same time, the boss gives his proposal. Confirming that he will receive a raise, A accepts the boss's proposal. Here, the ground rules will include: "Keep polite during the exchange," and "Distinguish fact-statements from opinion-statements."

In Japan, however, a person in a similar situation may start by giving plenty of circumstantial accounts until he senses that his boss would emotionally understand why he has to ask for raise, when he finally mentions the point. Even in explaining why he needs or deserves a raise, he will always attend to not sounding immodest. Instead of justifying himself straightforwardly, he would blur or modestly mention his achievements and contributions. The ground rule of keeping polite may be the same; however, in the Japanese context, politeness is often linked to modesty. Also, the ground rule of distinguishing fact-statements from opinion-statements may not be followed in the case here.

Now, we mentioned the relationship between script and predictability, pointing out that the script we have as part of our common sense may not work in the interaction with people of different cultural backgrounds. This is why we need to have a *valid script* as well as the ability to realize it in the target language in order to handle a task functionally. More precisely, a *valid script* is not something that one has in advance, but something that should be flexible and adjustable enough to handle a real-life task functionally, because in the context of living multiculturalism, one cannot simply assume *a priori* valid scripts.

Frames

As explained earlier, task handling competences are to be measured in terms of "task achievement." Most verbal tasks are goal-oriented; the goals would be exchanging greetings, finding solutions to a problem, explaining the features of a new product, asking for a raise in salary, and so forth. Also, many verbal tasks are procedural and predictable; therefore, even in complicated tasks, it is also possible to make plans and devise strategies to achieve their goals.

A verbal exchange has a flow – a flow of "frames." In a flow of verbal discourse following a conventional script, we can identify a series of "phases," which we call "frames." Thus, we can say that a script specifies a sequence of actions related temporally and causally, and the frames are the components of a script, or a given script has *n* frames.

Let us consider a negotiation scene. In order for a negotiation to take place, there exist differences in expectation between the parties concerned, and thus, the act of negotiation involves efforts to reduce the differences, although negotiation may end up with a zero-sum game or a plus-sum game. Hence, both parties present their demands, and compare and contrast them, revealing the differences. Both sides will employ strategies to reduce the differences for their own advantages. This may lead the two sides to reach the consensus or the point of compromise. If the consensus is successfully obtained, the negotiation session is over. If the effort of mutual adjustment turned unsuccessful, then each party will examine the causes of failure, and then start the session again. This is a rough script of a negotiation task, and this also shows that there are five frames involved in the script:

Presenting Demands　Comparing the Demands　Bargaining to reduce the differences

＜Success＞

＜Failure＞

Restarting negotiation　Examining the causes of failure

Figure 1. The script of negotiation

Let us now focus on the first frame, the frame of presenting demands. As shown below, there are different ways of presenting demands: a strong way, a soft way, a straightforward way, a cautious way (looking at the other's reaction), and so on.

Ways of Presenting Demands

a strong way　a soft way　a straightforward way　a cautious way

Figure 2. Options within a frame

This implies that the frame "presenting demands" contains frames, or sub-frames available for selection. The selection of a particular sub-frame depends on the content of a demand, the relationship with the other party, and other situational factors. The person in charge always tries to make the best choice—or what he or she thinks "the best" choice, although later on, it might turn out the second best.

We will note here that there are two characteristics worth mentioning about the notion of "frame." The first one is that frames can embed one [level-2 frame] within another [level-1 frame]. The second point to note is that the level-2 frames are open to a strategic selection. In other words, level-1 frames define what negotiation, for example, is, and level-2 frames permit the range of selection, and hence is closely related to strategies.

Here, we consider that an action script is characterized as a coherent sequence of level-1 frames. From this, one can assume that a person moves from one frame to another, but the move is an intentional act or even a strategic act. Thus, the notion of "move" becomes an important one here, together with script and frame. In verbal exchange, a person makes "a focusing move"—a move focusing on a certain topic, and then makes "an introducing move" – a move introducing what the person wants to say, while the partner reacts to the first person who said something by making "a supporting move" or “a challenging move.”

For example, in the following, person A is making a focusing / introducing move:

A: Well, I’d like to make some comment on what has been discussed so far. We say basically three problems with food –that of food prices, food shortages, and food quality. And we came here night prepared to discuss all three of those, but due to limitations of time, I suggest that we limit our analysis to that of food quality.

To this move, another person B reacts, by making a supporting move:

B: I would agree. I believe that the quantity of food and food prices are certainly of vital importance to the consumer, but essentially based on that, we are talking about the quality of food. And if we haven’t got good quality of food, then, we’re going to be in a lot of trouble.

In general, a focusing move directs our attention to a certain topic, and an introducing move gives us information about the topic; a supporting move helps develop and elaborate on an on-going discourse, while a challenging move may encounter a supporting move or another challenging move, or it may encourage a new focusing / introducing move. A challenging move will be motivated in many ways; one may challenge because, for example, one simply disagree with the speaker, one does not understand what the speaker said, or one wants the speaker to clarify the point further.

Above, we discussed that many of our actions are represented as events in script form. Script structures, which have experiential bases, have psychological reality; we know a great deal about the activities we participate in and can describe them verbally.

A person possesses perfect task handling competences if he or she can handle all possible tasks functionally. But this is not reality. Even in a situation using the native language, one automatically distinguishes “tasks one can handle” from “tasks one cannot handle,” and there are individual variations in task handling competences as to “what tasks one can handle in what way.” Language teachers and language testers are concerned with assessing and evaluating language learners’ communicative proficiency. To develop an assessment test battery, we need to be more specific about “what tasks one can handle in what way,” specific enough to be able to operationally define task handling competences.

In the preceding discussion, a scheme was proposed for characterizing tasks (i.e., “what tasks”), and the concept of script was introduced to discuss “task achievement” (i.e., "one can handle in what way"). Indeed, it is our claim that a script is a powerful tool when we discuss task handling competences, whether dealing with adults or young children. The child's earliest script emerges from action schemas such as throwing, and hitting, with the developing scripts being his or her conceptual foundations.

However, the preceding discussion has been primarily concerned with speaking tasks. There are also writing tasks, reading tasks, and listening tasks, or a combination of some or all of these. Even with speaking tasks, some tasks follow "strong scripts," others follow "weak scripts," or still others are relatively "script-free" as in creative tasks. Thus, in order to show the nature of verbal tasks we are concerned with, it is necessary to discuss each of the mode-specific tasks (or single-modal tasks): i.e., speaking tasks, writing tasks, listening tasks, and reading tasks.

Speaking Tasks

Speaking assumes the use of voice or linguistic sounds, and hence, in order to handle speaking tasks functionally, the ability to pronounce a language becomes a prerequisite here. In other words, the user of a language should be able to produce intelligible flows of sounds in the target language in handling speaking tasks (sign language is an equally powerful communication medium as oral language, although we do not discuss this matter in this paper). Functionality of linguistic sounds is influenced not singly, but collectively, by the clarity of pronunciation, speed of delivery, loudness, and even level of confidence. In most cases, phonological competence becomes the target of assessing communicative language competence. In this paper, we include it within the dimension of "intelligibility," because overall intelligibility, which subsumes phonological, grammatical, and semantic intelligibilities, is significantly impaired if phonological intelligibility is low.

Here, we would like to emphasize that speaking, when viewed from the perspective of communication skill, can no longer be the single ability of oral production. Hence, instead of talking of the speaking ability in general, or overall oral production, we should look at "different speaking tasks." In other words, instead of describing a person's speaking ability in general, as shown in the description, "can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on a wide range of subjects related to his / her field of interest," we should state that a person can handle such and such tasks in such and such degrees of functionality.

If the same overall system of assessment for speaking tasks is used, it must be used flexibly in order to capture the differing criteria for determining functionality of speaking tasks. Casual conversation and formal meetings require different skills to carry out functionally.

Thus, we should present a set of criteria or variables for classifying speaking tasks. To this end, we may consider the following:

Classifying the Types of Speaking Tasks

1. Directionality
2. Domain
3. Purpose
4. Channel / Medium

The first variable to consider is directionality; the one way [narrative] type and the two way [dialogue] type can be easily identified here:

Types of speaking tasks

one way [narrative] type: public speeches, presentations, lectures, story-telling, public announcements, sermons, sports commentaries, etc.

two way [dialogue] type: conversations, job interviews, coaching, advising, consultations, public debates, negotiations, etc.

In the one way type of speaking tasks, the speaker takes the initiative in developing a narrative discourse. Such tasks include: making a speech, making a presentation, explaining a product, telling a personal story, etc. In the two way type, both the speaker and the partner develop a dialogue discourse jointly and interactively, with everyday conversation being the most typical example. Discussions for problem-finding and problem-solving, arguments for debating, and negotiations of various kinds are also typical examples of the two way type.

The second variable to consider is "domains." The concept of "domain" refers to a general context of situation in which a language is used for social purposes. Speaking tasks are categorized in a set of domains. There are different ways of distinguishing different domains. According to the Common European Framework, the following categories are suggested with pedagogical purposes in mind, and we follow its system:

"The personal domain, in which the person concerned lives as a private individual, centered on home life with family and friends, and engages in individual practices;
The public domain, in which the person concerned acts as a member of the general public,

or of some organization, and is engaged in transactions of various kinds for a variety of purposes;
The occupational domain, in which the person concerned is engaged in his or her job or profession;
The educational domain, in which the person concerned is engaged in organized learning, especially (but not necessarily) within an educational institution." (p. 45)

The concept of domain is linked with the concepts of "place" and "situation." Place is a relatively objective concept. For example, a classroom, a restaurant, a hotel, a hospital, an office, and a park are all places. A given place tends to be associated with prototypical participants; a classroom, for example, is associated with the teacher and the students. Also, places and domains generally—not always, though—correlate with each other: a school is an educational domain; a hospital is a public domain; an office is a occupational domain, and so forth. The concept of "situation" is more subtle and difficult to define, but it generally refers to a context relating to "who does what for what purpose." If we select an office as the target place, it will be one of the places in the occupational domain, and the person concerned will be placed in a context of situation in which he writes e-mails, a trip report or a memorandum, reads a manual paper, exchanges name cards, gives or receives an account of the monthly goals, attends a regular meeting, and so on. To take a school as another example, within an educational domain, the person will be placed in a context of situation in which she attends a morning assembly, receives lessons, chats with friends during the break, does a science experiment, presents a homework assignment in front of the class, and so forth.

"Place" is just an objective category, and when it is linked with a domain, it becomes a context in which social life is organized. A school, for example, is a just a name for a building or a place, and it turns into a sphere of action when we put it in an educational domain, or a public domain. In principle, a place can be any domain. With "situation," we can visualize what doings are being carried out by who and why. Depending on who does what for what reason, a place can be a situation in which more than one domain is involved.

The third variable to consider is "purpose." As long as speaking is a communicative act, it must have its purpose. When we ask what the purpose of speaking is, we are asking what the speaker intends to do in speaking. The purpose of speaking may be overt or covert to the speaker, depending on the nature of speaking tasks. And, in practice, it is difficult to show a complete list of purposes, yet the purposes can be described at the macro level or at the micro level. As discussed earlier, at the macro level, we may use

Halliday's system, which is duplicated below:

(1) Instrumental ("I want") Function: Satisfying material needs.
(2) Regulatory ("Do as I tell you") Function: Controlling the behavior of others.
(3) Interactional ("Me and you") Function: Getting along with others.
(4) Personal ("Here I come") Function: Identifying and expressing the self.
(5) Heuristic ("Tell me why") Function: Exploring the world around and inside one.
(6) Imaginative ("Let's pretend") Function: Creating a world of one's own.
(7) Informative ("I've got something to tell you") Function: Communicating new information.

Primitive forms of these functions already appear in young children, and interestingly enough, various acts of language use by adults can be analyzed within the same framework. The differences between children and adults are considered to be a matter of elaboration when realizing these common functions. At the micro level, we could list countless purposes, such as ordering a meal, making an appointment, complaining about something, apologizing, criticizing, and so forth. The point here is that the micro level purposes are to be subsumed under the macro level purposes. For example, both ordering a meal and making an appointment will be under the instrumental function. However, we should note here that it is rare that an act of language use is performed for a single purpose. It is often the case that when one performs a speech act, one has multiple purposes. For example, making a speech is primarily for the personal function, but at the same time, it can be for the heuristic, imaginative, and informative functions. As a measure of handling competence of speaking tasks, whether one can use a language for a given purpose is of critical importance, because the purpose of speaking is directly linked with the goal of task handling, that is, "task achievement."

The fourth variable to consider here is "channel" or instrumental medium. Obviously, one cannot communicate with the other unless there is a channel between them. A channel here means an instrumental medium that links the two parties for the purpose of communication. In a face to face verbal interaction, the channel is a direct face to face relationship. There are cases like speaking to a person over a phone, making an on-line computer conference, and so forth, without constrained by the here and now condition. Telephones, radios, TVs, letters, and computers are all instrumental media, and provide channels for communication. Thus, we have speaking tasks which involve different instrumental media, and in these cases, we are also concerned with the number of interlocutors – a person to person talk, a small group talk, a talk addressed to a small [large] group, and the like.

Thus, speaking tasks will be categorized according to directionality, domain, purpose, and channel / medium. And to assess task performance, the assessment framework for productive task handling discussed in paper 1 will be used as a guideline, a framework which put first priority on functionality: i.e., functionality [adjustability [intelligibility, well-formedness, and appropriateness]. However, this general framework has to be tuned to assess speaking tasks; the assessment framework for speaking tasks will have two categories: (1) "language," corresponding to well-formedness, appropriateness, and intelligibility (2) "speaking management competence," corresponding to adjustability.

The "language" category has three dimensions, as below:

Language

- Simple --------------- Elaborate
- Erroneous -----------Error-Free
- Appropriate ---------Inappropriate

The dimension of "simple – elaborate" is measured with respect to syntactic complexity and the range of stylistic variation or register. On the other hand, the dimension of "erroneous – error free" is measured in terms of the nature of errors – for example, local errors which does not affect task handling, and can be easily ignored vs. global errors which hinder task handling significantly. Here, we note that in a natural discourse of casual conversation, we may witness a number of "errors" from the standpoint of a sentence grammar, and yet some of them may not be considered "errors" as long as they are within the permissible range of a natural discourse of spontaneous speech. The dimension of "appropriate – inappropriate" has two aspects: pragmatic appropriateness and organizational appropriateness, both being relatively culture-specific. Pragmatic appropriateness is concerned with the choice of words, while organizational appropriateness, with the information structure of utterance.

The use of these dimensions must differ according to the type of speaking tasks. The task of making a formal presentation requires the user's language to be elaborate, error-free, and both pragmatically and organizationally appropriate, where appropriateness is not culturally, but situationally determined. Here again, the overall criterion of functionality overrides the criteria of linguistic dimensions. For example, in a task of telling a taxi driver your destination in Bangkok, simple, and even erroneous English could be more functional than elaborate and error-free English.

Conventionally, it is assumed that the linguistic norms are described in terms of well-formedness (especially, grammaticality) and appropriateness, both being determined culturally, and that if the conditions of well-formedness and appropriateness obtain, then intelligibility is guaranteed. However, in the context of living multiculturalism, the user of a language is required to negotiate and accommodate meanings, thus "adjustability" being a higher criteria than intelligibility, well-formedness and appropriateness. Put differently, the assumption here is that intelligibility, well-formedness, and appropriateness are all subject to constant adjustment for achieving functionality. For adjustability, we introduce the category called "speaking management competence," which has three components, that is, "skill employment," "strategic adjustment," and "self-editing competence."

Speaking Management Competence

- Skill Employment
- Strategic Adjustment
- Self-editing Competence

The act of speaking normally assumes the listener, and to be cooperative with the listener, the speaker should use the language to be consistent with the listener's expectations. In other words, the speaker can live up to the listener's expectation if he or she uses a language in a way that is readily comprehensible with least cognitive burden on the part of the listener. For this, as we discussed above, we should note that many verbal acts follow tacit scripts. We characterized "communication skill" as having a valid (flexible) script for a given act and having the ability to verbalize the script. Thus, if the speaker employs a communication skill to perform a given task, then we claim that the speaker is following the listener's expectation. This we call "skill employment."

On the other hand, we cannot simply assume that a given script is valid in a given situation; verbal transaction involves a lot of spontaneity. Thus, we claimed that a "valid" script is, in fact, a flexible script to fit the situation. To make a script valid in a situation, and handle spontaneous transaction, one needs to have the ability to adjust and accommodate meanings. This we call "strategic adjustment." With strategic adjustment, one may maneuver to avoid a certain topic, abandon a message, reframe a topic, clarify misunderstanding, and so on.

As mentioned above, "errors" are natural consequences of spontaneous language production. Most errors of this kind will be simply ignored in transaction between native speakers of a language. A fully competent user of a language is able to distinguish errors which are permissible and ignorable from those which need repairing or correction. We call the ability to monitor and correct one's language "self-editing competence." We will include this editing competence within the category "speaking management competence."

In a natural flow of conversation, we inevitably make lexical, grammatical and semantic errors, and we are able to monitor or spot the place where something went awry, and if needed, to repair it. We think that this self-editing competence should be more emphasized than the ability to speak fluently when assessing oral proficiency, or the handling competence of speaking tasks, to be more exact, in that one needs to edit an on-line text so as to say something consistent and coherent. With an on-line text, one cannot go back and erase a problematic phrase; if something goes wrong, one should rephrase it, or repair it in a successive manner, leaving the wrong trace behind.

Assessing Task Performance in Speaking Tasks

Thus, to summarize, in order to assess the language user's speaking ability, it is important to consider speaking to be a skill to be used for achieving a task. Then, we have a speaking task, and the task achievement is the target of assessment. Here, we are concerned with the situation in which a person uses his English in handling speaking tasks. The general framework of assessment here is the following:

Functionality
  Adjustability
    Intelligibility
    Well-formedness
    Appropriateness

This general framework is being translated into the following framework for speaking tasks.

Overall Evaluation Framework for Speaking Tasks

Functionality = Task Achievement
<u>Criteria for Assessment</u>
■ **language use**
・simple <--→ elaborate
the ability to handle syntactic potentials and
stylistic variations [pragmatic appropriateness]

- erroneous <---→ error-free

  the problem of well-formedness / the problem of choice

■ **speaking management competence**

- skill employment (presentation, coaching, chairing, etc.)[organizational appropriateness]
- strategic adjustment [adjustability]
- self-editing competence [monitoring and repairing] [adjustability]

One can measure speaking task handling competence in a test format such as interview sessions and group sessions. In this case, one should devise questions which elicit responses relevant to speaking management competence and self-editing competence, with language being the common index. A testee's performance will be videtaped, and assessed by at least two raters with respect to the functionality of language use, *flexibly using* the framework shown here because different tasks require different points to emphasize.

Writing Tasks

For the act of writing, we must assume that a person is able to use letters in the alphabetic system as a medium of communication, thus having orthographic competence. If one writes something, it becomes a written text composed of letters. A written text can be revised through the process of editing—deleting, adding, changing, and moving. As a result, a new revised version looks different from the original version.

Here, we are basically concerned with writing as a communication skill to be employed for handling tasks. Here again, a person's task handling competence is defined in terms of what types of writing tasks he or she can perform and how functional his or her task handling is. Thus, to discuss what types of writing tasks he or she can perform, we need to classify writing tasks. Classification of writing tasks is also important for the second point of "how functional his or her task handling is" because the conditions for functionality may well differ according to the type of tasks, or the type of text to be written. Some texts are a creative type, while others are a fill-in-the-blank type. Texts are written for various purposes. Some are written for publication; some, for recoding; some, for information conveying, and so forth.

As in the case of speaking tasks, we may use a simple framework within which to classify writing tasks, a framework consisting of domain and style. The domain would be the personal domain, the public domain, the educational domain, or the occupational domain, and the style would be either formal or informal (or casual). People are sensitive to and very much concerned with the degree of formality more in writing than in speaking; thus, we put domain and style together to produce the following:

		Style	
		Formal	Informal
Domain	Personal	A	B
	Public	C	D
	Educational	E	F
	Occupational	G	H

For example, within the personal domain, one may write an e-mail in either formal or informal style. If, on the other hand, one write an academic paper within the educational domain, the style of writing is likely to be formal. The dimension of “formal to informal” may not answer all cases, even when we interpret “informal” flexibly covering “casual” and “intimate,” because there are cases in which one simply fill in the blanks with words or phrases such as personal details, name, and nationality. In such a case as writing the format, we may only consider the domain side, ignoring the style. The following is just a sample of writing tasks:

Types of writing tasks

writing papers, fictions and non-fictions, essays
writing cards and letters for personal reasons
writing e-mails
participating on-line computer conferences, chats on computers
writing business letters
writing personal letters
writing academic reports, reaction papers, term papers
writing business reports
writing journals
writing memoranda, reports
filling in forms and questionnaires
writing leaflets
writing instruction manuals
writing memos, notes
writing poems

writing documents
filling in forms and questionnaires
leaving messages
drawing agreements / contracts
etc.

We can be more specific about the content of writing tasks by giving more information as in: writing simple notes to close friends, writing personal letters describing your experiences, writing a letter of complaint about the purchased product, and so on. Although the number of writing tasks can increase endlessly depending on how one describes a task, we can safely assume that some tasks are relevant and realistic to a given stage (within the range of stage 1 to stage 5). In stage 6, however, a careful needs analysis has to be conducted to identify which writing tasks are relevant to a certain group, because people in that stage have a wide range of different needs according to their objectives of using English.

Handling Competence of Writing Tasks

In general, writing competence is discussed and measured in terms of language, content, and organization. We also take it that this is a valid framework, although the items within the framework are originally devised in this paper.

Language

- simple ---- elaborate [syntactic & stylistic control]
- error-free ---- erroneous [linguistic well-formedness & technical well-formedness]

Content

- Topic / theme
- Thematic development
- Informativeness
- Persuasiveness
- Critical Perspective

Organization

- Coherence
- Logic [thought patterns]

For language, the dimension of "simple to elaborate" is relevant here. Some texts are written in simple language, while others in elaborate language. The dimension of "simple to elaborate" is related to the language user's syntactic and stylistic control. For example, the sentence "I rented Terminator 2. The movie was too violent for my tastes" is syntactically simple, while the sentence "Terminator 2, the movie that I rented, was too violent for me" involves the use of the appositive construction and the relative clause construction, thus being a more elaborate sentence. Not only syntactically, but also stylistically, a text can be simple or elaborate. Here, "stylistic control" refers to the ability to choose the right expression to fit the purpose.

It is generally expected in writing that a text should be error-free both linguistically and technically. Technical errors occur in the areas of spellings, spacing, and format. Thus, well-formedness in writing is directly linked with self-editing competence, with which a person can monitor and correct his or her own language. We must note, however, that language is not the only target of editing; content and organization are also subject to editing. Thus, we consider self-editing competence an overall competence in writing.

The quality of a written text is assessed not only linguistically, but also in terms of content. The content of a text is what it is about, and the following will be the points of consideration:

Content

- Theme [topic]
- Thematic Development
- Informativeness
- Persuasiveness
- Critical Perspective

The content is of critical importance when dealing with a text of some length such as reports, academic papers and essays. Clearly, a text must deal with a theme or a topic. The theme needs to be developed to provide the reader with enough information. There are cases in which a theme is mentioned, yet it is not developed. The text should be not only informative but also persuasive in order for the reader to have a sense of satisfaction after reading it. Some writings such as academic papers and essays often require to have a good perspective – often new and critical – to see and analyze the problem under consideration.

The content of a text is always paired with the organization of the text, both being inseparable. In fact, content and organization represent the sides of a piece of paper, with one being the front, and the other being the back. However, from the viewpoint of assessment, the aspect of organization may be highlighted. Text organization is mainly the problem of consistency, and to attain consistency, pieces of information must cohere together and flow in a logical way.

Organization

- Coherence
- Logic

In other words, one can say that the organization of a text is a consequence of thematic development. Abrupt change of topics, hasty conclusions, confusion of fact-statement and opinion-statement, and the like all result in organizationally poor texts.

How to organize a text is a matter of rhetoric, or patterns of thinking. When one writes a paper of some length, one may most likely choose a pattern of thinking from the following list:

Patterns of Thinking [Rhetorical Patterns]

- Problem-solving
- Comparison-Contrast
- Opinion-statement
- Narrative [e.g., chronological & spatial development]

These rhetorical patterns are far from mutually exclusive. When we call it a pattern, we are concerned with the focal point of writing. For example, the problem-solving type has an organizational flow of information as shown below:

Something is wrong. → The problem is this. → Let us analyze the problem. → There are some possible solutions. → The best solution is this. → Let us conclude this discussion.

This flow does not exclude the possibility that other types of rhetorical pattern are used to reinforce the problem-solving development. It is, in fact, very likely that to select the best solution from possible solutions, for example, one may use the rhetorical pattern of comparison and contrast. At any rate, however, the flow of problem-solving discourse is what we call "a script." To handle a writing task involving the rhetorical pattern of problem solving, one should be able to verbalize the script. This is exactly the case of "skill employment," as defined above, which is included within "writing management competence."

Assessing Task Performance in Writing Tasks

The general framework of assessment for writing tasks is the same as the one for speaking tasks because both are related to productive competence:

Functionality
  Adjustability
    Intelligibility
    Well-formedness
    Appropriateness

This general framework is being translated into a more specific framework designed for writing tasks.

Thus, as a framework for assessing writing competence, we introduced three perspectives—language, content, and organization. However, we pointed out that content and organization are not separable. To deal with this, we suggested that the aspect of organization should be considered under "writing management competence." We also suggested that in handling writing tasks, self-editing competence is of particular importance. This also will be treated under "writing management competence." With these adjustments, we propose a framework within which to assess the functionality of handling writing tasks, as follows:

Framework for Assessment of Writing Task Handling

functional = task achievement

■ **language use**

・simple ------ elaborate

—the ability to handle syntactic potentials and

—stylistic variations [the problem of choice]

・erroneous ------ error-free

—the problem of grammatical well-formedness

・Technical Aspects: misspellings, punctuations, format, style, etc.

■ **content construction**

・theme
・thematic development
・informativeness
・persuasiveness
・critical perspective
■ **writing management competence**
・skill employment for good organization (report writing, proposal writing, memo-writing, etc.)
・self-editing competence [monitoring and correcting]

In actual assessment, self-editing competence may be, for example, measured by giving the language testees a task to edit a text. Skill employment in writing management competence will be tested not only by giving tasks such as writing a proposal, writing a memorandum, and writing an outline, but also by focusing on rhetorical techniques such as comparison and contrast, spatial arrangement, temporal sequence, cause and effect, and illustration (cf. Weigle for general issues of assessing writing).

Listening Comprehension Tasks

In two way interactions, listening and speaking are not separate acts, but intricately related and connected within an individual. Conventionally, however, speaking and listening have been treated as different skills, which require different theories—a theory of production and a theory of comprehension, respectively. Psycholinguistics textpapers usually treat production and comprehension in different papers, as if they are independent matters (see Rubin 1994, Buck 2001 for a review of second language listening comprehension research). It is true that there are cases where we can reasonably talk about listening comprehension tasks with listening being the primary concern, such as listening to music, listening to radio news, watching TV programs, and seeing films. However, even in these listening-focused tasks, listening comprehension interacts with speaking within an individual, who may get involved in intra-personal communication by, for example, reacting to what he or she listens.

Here, we would like to emphasize that listening comprehension involves sense-making, by which we construct meaning or a state of affairs out of the given *words* [sounds]. The italic form "w*ord"* with the plural maker –s is used to refer to an utterance. The italic form also indicates that *words* are sounds, or a verbal stimulus which does not contain the meaning. In other words, constructing meaning [a state of affairs] out of the spoken *words* (i.e., an utterance) is what a person as the listener does. The same person as the speaker constructs his or her meaning [a state of affairs] into *words*. In general, we tend to think that in the act of speaking, we have a message [meaning] to convey, and we use *words* to convey it. But, as we discuss later in paper 9, this is not what is going on inside us. It is impossible to have *a priori* meaning before saying something. In saying something, we construct meaning or what we want to say.

Listening comprehension – the act of constructing meaning [that is, a state of affairs] out of the *words* (i.e., the utterance made)
Speaking – the act of constructing meaning [a state of affairs] into *words*.

We call the internal process of constructing meaning out of [into] the *words* "sense making." The act of listening inevitably involves sense-making; it does not simply mean to listen to the sounds, but to understand what is said by making sense of the sounds. Thus, listening comprehension involves semantic [sense-making] competence as well as phonological [sound recognition] competence. In the following section, we would like to discuss the interplay of listening comprehension and speaking within an individual.

Conversation Dynamics: The Relationship between Listening and Speaking

The point to be emphasized here is that listening comprehension does not simply mean the recovery of the intended meaning. Meaning does not simply exist in the spoken *words*, but it must be constructed by the person who receives the utterance. In other words, listening comprehension is a very active process of making sense of what is said.

The detail of the theoretical position assumed here will be discussed later in this paper (see paper 9). However, the important points are in order (Note that the content of discussion here is also relevant to our understanding speaking tasks). Strictly speaking, the intended meaning and the interpreted meaning never coincide perfectly, and furthermore, there is no way of ascertaining whether the two meanings are congruent and compatible. This is what conversation as a social interaction is all about. To illustrate the point, let us look at the following figure:

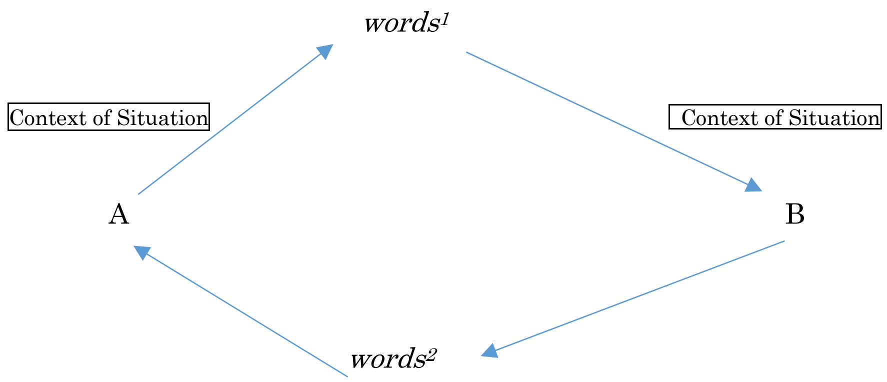

Figure 3. Conversational Transaction

In this figure, conversation transactions between A and B will be described this way. A utters *words*[1] out of his context of situation, and B takes the *words*[1] (i.e., the utterance made) now detached from A's context of situation, and makes sense of them, and then replies by uttering *words*[2] (i.e., an utterance).

The first point to notice here is that listening to and comprehending the *words*[1] automatically motivates the process of thinking about how to respond to them. The *words*[1] are a trigger of B's sense-making, which, in turn, involves not only comprehending the *words*[1] but also responding to them. Thus, speaking and listening are not separate acts which are assigned to person A and person B, respectively, but, in fact, both are interrelated seamlessly within an individual.

The second point to notice here is that conversation is a verbal interaction, or interaction between *words*[1] and *words*[2], yet the interaction depends on the interaction of mutual sense-making between the two persons. *Words* are a medium of interaction, and how the *words* are interpreted depends on the interpreter's sense-making; thus, meaning always depends on the other. Person A cannot ascertain how his utterance is interpreted by person B, until person A gets B's *words*. Take a simple case of transaction:

A: I was wondering if we could go to a nice restaurant together sometime.
B: Oh, give me a break. You're kidding again.
A: Yeah, forget it. I'm just kidding.

Suppose that person A's context of situation is like this: "I really like B and wishe to invite her to dinner, but I am not confident." And he indirectly utters, "I was wondering if we could go to a nice restaurant together sometime." Person B's context of situation is like this: "I know that he means it, and that he likes me; but I take it as a nuisance because I don't like him; nevertheless, I think it is not wise to be honest with my feelings." And, therefore, B replies by saying, "Oh give me a break. You're kidding again," with a smile on her face. This utterance of B's, superficially at least, suggests that B takes A's *words* as a light joke. But A does not take it literally, and empathically projects himself into B's context of situation, inferring: "B is not interested in me, and she thinks it is out of the question going to a restaurant together. Yet she does not want to upset me, and plays it safe by saying, "Oh, give me a break. You're kidding again," with a smile on her face." On the basis of this inference, A thinks he does not want to be hurt, and pretends to take her *words* literally, responding, "Yeah, forget it. I'm just kidding."

There would be no trouble if this conversation faded out naturally, reaching the stage of saying "goodbye." What if, however, B reacts to A's utterance "Yeah, forget it. I'm just kidding" by saying, "What? You were just kidding me? A shame on you! I hate you"? Now, notice that A's context of situation drastically changes, because with B's utterance as a response to A's, A realizes for the first time that : "She wanted to go out with me, but she was too modest to accept my offer straightly. And she uttered the *words* "Oh give me a break. You're kidding again" because she was not confident and wanted to double confirm that I really wanted her to go to a restaurant together." In other words, A is being compelled to restructure the foregoing context of situation. Simply put, A misunderstood B's *words.*

Thus, the act of listening involves not only listening to *words*, but also constructing a state of affairs out of the *words*. Since listening always presupposes speaking, listening comprehension should be viewed as an internal process of making sense of *words* (i.e., sounds), and constructing a state of affairs. And, as suggested in the conversational transaction above, the state of affairs constructed out of *words* includes not only content construction, but also the partner's intention, attitude, and expression.

	Content Construction
Listening Comprehension	Uptaking of the speaker's intension
	Uptaking of the speaker's attitude
	Uptaking of the speaker's expression

When we listen to someone's *words*, we are interested not only in what he or she says (i.e., the content of the utterance), but also in why and how he or she says it (i.e., the speaker's intention and attitude). The speaker's intention here is understood with the following question: what does the speaker want to do or want the interlocutor to do in saying something? For example, even a simple utterance like "There is a bull in the field," the speaker's intention may be one or some of the following: reporting the fact that there is a bull in the field, warning that you should not go to the field because it is dangerous, expressing one's anger (because the speaker had asked the listener to keep in a bull), asking the listener to keep an eye on the bull, and so forth. On the other hand, the speaker's attitude here is concerned with whether or not the speaker is sincere and honest when he or she is saying something. The default attitude is: Be sincere and tell the truth. The speaker can say something as an irony, a sarcasm, a joke, a jest, or even a lie, which are attitudinal variants. In other words, some utterances should not be taken literally, but interpreted within an attitudinal frame of, for example, joke or lie. From the listener's point of view, he or she listens to the *words* with the frame "This is a joke," for example.

Also, the act of speaking inevitably involves the presentation of the self, which will be captured here with respect to the speaker's expression. We often recognize "expressions" the speaker is wearing from vocal, facial, and kinesthetic cues, and say, for example, "She said such and such, wearing a sad [delighted, angry] expression." Expressions can be a reflection of state personality.

That is, listening comprehension is not simply a matter of sound recognition, but refers to the ability to construct a state of affairs comprising the words' meaning [content of the words] and the speaker's meaning [the speaker's intention, attitude, and expression]. This applies not only to face-to-face interactions, but also to other listening tasks in general, because the semantic content of what one hears consists of the *words'* meaning and the speaker's meanings. We also note that we listen and respond—externally or internally, and thus, listening comprehension should be understood in relation to the ability to make a response, although the necessity to make a response is weak with some listening comprehension tasks.

Now, we encounter a variety of listening comprehension tasks. As in the case of speaking tasks, we may divide listening comprehension tasks into the one way type and the two way type.

one-way type : public speeches, presentations, lectures, news broadcasts, TV dramas, movie, sports commentaries, public announcements, etc.

interactive type : conversations, interviews, discussions, meetings (on-line computer conferences), debates, negotiations, telephone conversations

Listening comprehension tasks of one way type put less emphasis on the responding phase, because the listener is primarily concerned with "having a good time listening," "getting information by listening," "learning by listening," and so on, feeling no strong sense of obligation to make a response after listening. On the other hand, listening comprehension tasks of two-way type basically follow what has been discussed above. In verbal interaction, there always exists the partner, and hence, the phases of comprehension and response must receive equal attention.

In discussing the handling of listening comprehension tasks, the listener's role and the purpose of listening are important mutually related variables.

Role / Purpose

- as the partner of a dialogue
- as the learner who learns something or obtain information about some subject matters
- as the counselor who is trying to empathically understand the other
- as the fan who listens for the purpose of entertainment or getting information about what's going on.

The listener's roles include: the partner of a conversation, the counselor, the learner, the fan, and so on. The listener as a partner of conversation will listen to a person in order to keep conversation rolling. The listener as a counselor may listen to a person non-judgmentally in order to empathically understand what he or she has to say. The listener as a learner may listen to people in order to learn something, or get new information. The listener as a fan will listen to a program for entertainment. Roughly speaking, there are three basic stances the listener can take: a critical, challenging stance and an empathic, supporting stance, with a neutral stance being in between.

Assessing task performance in listening comprehension tasks

A task, whether it be a speaking task or a listening task, is something that should be achieved. Thus, here again, "task achievement" virtually means the same thing as the functionality of handling tasks. As regards listening comprehension tasks, both sound recognition and semantic comprehension need to be taken into account (Richards 1983, Mendelsohn 1998). There are individual differences with respect to the ability to handle tasks functionally. The "task difficulty" of listening comprehension tasks is often accounted for in terms of topical complexities, the degree of familiarity, phonological and prosodic features such as speech rate and pauses, syntactic and stylistic elaboration, and so on (Derwing 1990, Schmidt-Rinehart 1994). Thus, conventionally, level descriptions for listening comprehension consider these factors, as exemplified in the following statements (quoted from the Common European Framework [2001]):

Overall Listening Comprehension

C-1 Level-4

Can understand enough to follow extended speech on abstract and complex topics beyond his/her own field, though he/she may need to confirm occasional details, especially if the accent is unfamiliar. Can recognize a wide range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, appreciating register shifts. Can follow extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signaled explicitly.

Understanding Conversation between Native Speakers

C-1 Level-4

Can easily follow complex interactions between third parties in group discussion and debate, even on abstract, complex unfamiliar topics.

Ideally, assessment of listening comprehension is carried out in accordance with these descriptors. It is our opinion, however, that shifting these descriptions into the criteria for assessing listening comprehension is not an easy job. Basically, CEFR uses the wordings such as “can follow,” “can understand,” and “can recognize.” These are reasonable descriptors, and still yet fail to capture the dynamic nature of listening comprehension (cf. Buck 2002 for general issues of assessing listening).

If a person is capable of handling listening comprehension tasks functionally, he or she should be able to demonstrate his or her ability to comprehend the text, and to report what he or she has heard, paraphrasing what he or she has heard, and reacting to what he or she has heard. In other words, the dynamic nature of listening comprehension can be tapped by testing listening comprehension at both the comprehension phase and the response phase.

Criteria for Assessment of Listening Comprehension

Functional = Task Achievement

↓↓

【Comprehension Phase】

- content construction
- empathic projection
- expectancy

【Response Phase】

・reporting（what you've heard）
・paraphrasing（what you've heard）
・reacting（to what you've heard）

Even at the comprehension phase, listening comprehension does not simply include content construction. Certainly, content construction is a major aspect of listening comprehension, and in fact, most standard tests are concerned only with content construction in testing learners' listening comprehension. However, comprehending the spoken *words* also includes "empathic projection" and "expectancy." By "empathic projection," the listener tries to infer the speaker's context of situation, and by so doing, comprehend the speaker's meanings – the speaker's intention, attitude, and expression.

The listener does not simply pay attention to the in-coming sounds; he or she is not locally bound. It is true that the listener constructs a state of affairs (i.e., meaning) out of the *words* (i.e., sounds) uttered by the speaker in a bottom-up fashion, but at the same time, he or she uses a top-down strategy, resorting to his or her existing knowledge, which works in a way to expect or "preempt" what the speaker will say. This is what we call "expectancy." This preemptive expectancy is a "heuristics," or the human ability to cope with daily activities, which are too ambiguous and complex for a computer or a robot to compute and handle well. If this strategy of expectancy did not work, then, the listener would be placed in the same situation as a computer or a robot which does not have workable common sense.

Thus, the comprehension phase includes content construction, empathic projection, and expectancy. Comprehension is, however, the inner processing of information; the speaker realizes how the listener interpreted his or her *words* only when the listener responds to the *words*. This motivates the inclusion of the response phase within listening comprehension tasks, the phase consisting of three components: reporting, paraphrasing, and reacting. Here, the term "reporting" is used to refer to the case in which the listener (now, as the speaker) tells someone what he or she has heard. Characteristically, *words* are being repeated with no conscious judgment in the act of reporting. A counselor may as well listen to the client by repeating the client's words to show that the counselor is truly following the client. On the other hand, the act of paraphrasing involves the listener's interpretation and judgment, because the content of the paraphrase would be what the listener thinks about what he or she has heard. The speaker is not able to see how the listener has interpreted his or her *words* if the listener reports or paraphrases the speaker's *words* without changing the meaning. It is the act of reacting which makes the original speaker to realize how his or her *words* have been interpreted or comprehended.

In devising listening comprehension tasks for the purpose of assessment, the following variables should be taken into consideration: the type (one way or two way), the channel (the telephone, the radio, the TV, etc.), linguistic features (style & register, syntactic complexities, etc.), and delivery features (speed, dialect, etc.). Since we are dealing with listening comprehension as a task, we should pay attention to both the comprehension phase and the response phase.

Reading Comprehension Tasks

Conventionally, we include writing and reading within the category "written communication." A person usually writes in order to be read by someone; reading always assumes writing. The target of reading is a written text, yet the reader knows that the text has the writer or author—the source from which the text comes. Then, the same argument about sense-making as made above holds true of reading comprehension tasks. In the process of reading, a reader is concerned not only with the text's meaning, but also with the writer's meanings.

If we consider the act of reading "a task," then the concept of "task handling" becomes relevant here again. A reader is expected to handle a reading comprehension task functionally. From the perspective of language assessment, the question of what tasks a person can perform in what way –that is, what kinds of reading text a person can read and how well he or she can read them —is critically important. In other words, the question of "what and how" should be taken into account here.

The question of "what" is concerned with the target text for reading. Reading texts include papers, magazines, newspapers, comic papers, manuals, textpapers, brouchures, leaflets, ads, and the list goes on and on.

Types of Reading Comprehension Tasks

reading papers, magazines, newspapers, comic strips
reading instruction manuals, textpapers
reading brochures, leaflets;
reading everyday needs (time, money, phone and ID numbers, units of measurement)
reading announcements, timetables, product ads and labels; public signs and notices
reading forms and questionnaires
reading business and professional letters, faxes
reading personal letters

reading essays
reading reports and papers
reading notes and messages
reading web sites
etc.

A learner's reading competence can be roughly measured by simply giving a set of reading texts and distinguishing easy readings from difficult ones. In order to read a text, one needs to have both lexical and grammatical competences; these are, however, the matters of language resources. We should be more concerned with the question of why we read, which has direct bearing on the question of how.

Indeed, one reads for different purposes. Roughly, the following will be the main purposes for reading:

Purposes for Reading
・Reading for information
・Reading for learning
・Reading for argument
・Reading for pleasure

Different tasks will be subsumed under the same purpose. One may read for information on various occasions: one may read academic papers in order to write his dissertation, read ads to compare stores in terms of discount rate, read guidepapers to find good places to travel, read a medical encyclopedia to see the symptoms of a disease, and countless tasks will be listed.

"Reading for learning" is typically observed in classroom settings. As in the case of reading a textpaper, this type of reading aims at learning about a subject and memorizing what is read [learned] as part of the reader's knowledge. The reader tries to understand what is written as literally as possible, without being selective or giving personal opinions.

"Reading for argument" is typically the case of literary critics. Characteristically, it involves analysis and criticism. One may read into a letter of complaint or a new proposal critically with the analytic mind. In some situations, the reader's primary concern is more with the writer's mind or feelings than with the text itself; the reader is interested in why a text is written, not in what a text is. This will be considered a case of "reading for argument" in that the text is the only cue the reader can use in order to get at the writer's intention.

Finally, "reading for pleasure" is a general style adopted when reading novels, comic papers, newspapers, and magazines as part of one's daily activities. One may read to appreciate the style of writing, skim over to find something interesting, or to read to follow a story line.

A little reflection however shows that the act of reading involves different concerns, and hence, it is not realistic to say that "a person reads this text for this purpose." We accept this point, although we still claim that the purpose of reading is a variable influencing the functionality of handling reading comprehension tasks. The point here is that if reading is a task, then it must have its purpose. Depending on the purpose, the task of content construction, for example, might be different: one may read for detailed understanding, for gist, for specific information, or for implications.

However, when it comes to reading comprehension, we should note that the act of reading is unlike the act of speaking or writing, which is considered a skill to be trained; the act of reading, like the act of listening, is an integrated construction process of meaning out of the written *words*. One can learn how to speak and write effectively in training programs designed for mastering communication skills. However, listening and reading are not likely to be considered "communication skills," which are to be trained professionally. Aside from special cases such as a counselor learning how to listen professionally, one simply learns to listen only by listening. In the same way, as Smith (1979) pointed out, one "learns how to read only by reading."

Assessing Task Performance in Reading Comprehension Tasks

We have countless occasions to read, and each occasion gives us a task to handle. For making an assessment of how well a person can handle the task, we use the same general framework as we introduced for listening comprehension tasks. The functionality of task handling as defined as "task achievement" becomes the prime criterion, where the content of "task achievement" differs according to the purpose of a reading task. The task has two phases: the comprehension phase and the response phase. Within the comprehension phase, we have three sub tasks: content construction, empathic projection, and expectancy; within the response phase we have also three sub tasks: reporting, paraphrasing, and reacting.

Assessment Schema for Reading Comprehension Tasks

Functional=Task Achievement

↓
【Comprehension Phase】
content construction
empathic projection
expectancy
【Response phase】
reporting what you've read
paraphrasing what you've read
reacting to what you've read

Traditionally, reading comprehension has been defined with respect to topics, complexity of texts, and linguistic features. To give a representative example, the following are quotes from CEFR (2001):

<u>Overall Listening Comprehension</u>

C-1 Level-4

Can understand enough to follow extended speech on abstract and complex topics beyond his/her own field, though he/she may need to confirm occasional details, especially if the accent is unfamiliar. Can recognize a wide range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, appreciating register shifts. Can follow extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signaled explicitly.

Reading comprehension tests are to be designed to represent these descriptors. However, as mentioned in the section of listening comprehension tasks, the predicates such as "follow," "recognize," and "understand" are difficult to translate into measurable devices. Moreover, reading comprehension is an integrated construction process of meaning out of the written *words*, and, hence, it requires the ability to read the written *words* – sometimes called "orthoepic competence" – and the ability to make sense of them.

One may read in different ways – reading for gist, reading for implications, and reading for criticism, and so forth. No matter what the specific purpose of reading may be, one needs to construct the content of the *words*, to empathically project oneself into the writer's position so as to infer his or her unspoken messages, and to expect what will follow using the reader's expectancy grammar.

At the same time, reading comprehension is an inner, *invisible* process of constructing a state of affairs out of the written *words*; thus, one needs to elicit responses from the reader regarding how he or she has read the text. The response may be a simple one or demanding one depending on the task requirement. Here again, we have three response tasks: the reporting task, the paraphrasing task, and the reacting task. The reader reports what he or she has read without judgment—for example, by repeating the sentences in the text, paraphrases the text—for example, by summarizing the reading text in the reader's own words, and reacts to the text—for example, by stating the reader's opinions about the text.

This is a general scheme for assessing the task performance in reading comprehension. As mentioned above, depending on the purpose of reading, the points of emphasis will naturally differ. For example, in the case of reading ads for information, "content construction," which is the major task, and probably "reporting" and "paraphrasing," will be the tasks to handle, while the other tasks such as "empathic projection" and "reacting" are being put aside.

Task Handling Competences and Spiral Communication Progress

Thus, task handling competences are directly linked with the functional use of "my English," and their measures are essential to assessing an individual's overall communicative English competence. With "tasks," we are concerned primarily with real-life tasks ranging from simple to demanding ones. Then, in order to put real-life tasks into pedagogical contexts, the two problems emerge. One is related to the problem of de-contextualization, and the other, to the number of tasks.

Real-life tasks are contextualized spatially and temporally in a given situation. The definition of "my English" has been, in fact, made with reference to the real-life context. For the purpose of assessing task performance, however, abstraction of real situations is inevitable. The challenge to a test designer is, then, to simulate or reconstruct real-life situations by providing contexts in a test-taking situation.

The second problem is that there are too many tasks to enumerate. We assume, however, that it is possible to draw samples of tasks, including production tasks, comprehension tasks, and interaction tasks, which represent the population of tasks for each developmental stage, although we must admit that the degree of representativeness decreases with stage 6 where real-life tasks the user of a language encounters are diverse and unpredictable. For practical reasons, we may draw samples of the following size:

STAGE	TASKS				
	Speaking	Writing	Listening	Reading	Combination

Stage-1	300	--	200	--	200
Stage-2	400	--	300	--	300
Stage-3	500	50	400	100	400
Stage-4	600	100	500	150	500
Stage-5	700	500	600	500	600
Stage-6	1000	800	800	1000	1000

These are just hypothetical figures, yet if 500 samples of speaking tasks are being drawn for stage-3, for example, we are in a position to tell the upper limit of speaking task performance within this stage. The questions to be asked for assessment are as follows:

(1) What tasks are expected to be performed by the user of a language in a given stage?
(2) What tasks can the user of a language handle?
(3) How well can the user of a language handle?

The assumption here is that the world of communication for a given stage is being reasonably defined in terms of a set of tasks and a set of language resources. Real-life tasks, however, require the activation of different modes of communication. For example, in a job interviewing situation, the interviewee must appeal himself or herself by employing a good speaking skill, and at the same time, he or she must be able to listen for what is asked at each moment of the interviewing session. Thus, this is a case of the combination task or multi-modal task of speaking and listening.

A set of tasks will be stored in a database in the form of stage-specific content syllabi, as we discuss later in the next paper. For the format of putting tasks into a database, we will use the following on the basis of the preceding discussion:

TASK:[ ]
STAGE: 1 2 3 4 5 6

A. Mode of Communication

	Modes	Communication Skills
Speaking	☐	[ ]
Writing	☐	[ ]
Listening	☐	NA
Reading	☐	NA

B. Level of TASK Difficulty

easy ---------------- difficult

Simple --------------- complicated

Familiar ------------- unfamiliar

Prepared ------------ spontaneous

Procedural ---------- creative / imaginative

C. SCRIPT-ORIENTED ACTION

YES □ NO □

Root Script & Frames

Strategies [Moves]

D. Expressions (out of language resources)

For each task, task description is made along with the specification of the relevant stage. Then, this format has four categories. The category "mode of communication" is concerned with specifying whether the task is a speaking task, a writing task, a listening task, a reading task, or a multi-modal (or combination) task. If the task is either a speaking or a writing task, then, communication skills required for its performance – such as presentation skill and chairing skill—will be indicated, if necessary. The category of "level of task difficulty" is concerned with the difficulty of a particular task for a given stage in general, not for an individual, the levels of which will be estimated on the basis of the nature of the task. It is true that the same task will be handled differently according to different individuals, but we are here concerned with the construction of stage-specific content syllabi for tasks. The category "script-oriented actions" is relevant only to the tasks that are procedural in nature and allow a script-representation of procedural steps and operations involved. "Root scripts" are those scripts underlying the performance of tasks, which are conventionally shared by the users of a language, and they are described as a series of "frames." There are often strategic options within a frame, with respect to how to handle the frame in question. Finally, the category "expressions" is the place where relevant language resources to carry out a task are to be shown.