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METHODS OF ASSESSMENT OF ORAL  
PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS DURING  
ENGLISH LESSONS

**Bakalářská práce:** 0063 FP-*KAJ*

**Autor:**  
Růžena MIMROVÁ

**Podpis:**

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**Vedoucí práce:** PaedDr. Zuzana Šaffková, CSc., M.A

**Konzultant:**

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Jméno a příjmení: **Růžena Mimrová**  
Osobní číslo: **P08000514**  
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Bakalářská práce se zaměří na porovnání způsobů hodnocení mluvních dovedností žáků v hodinách anglického jazyka v prvním ročníku střední školy. Cílem je ověřit, zda je možné žáky efektivně hodnotit nepřímou metodou, která nebude žáky stresovat a zároveň poskytne učiteli možnost posoudit jak plynulost, tak přesnost ústního projevu.

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Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

PaedDr. Zuzana Šaffková, CSc., M.A.  
Katedra anglického jazyka


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doc. RNDr. Miroslav Brzezina, CSc.  
děkan

L.S.



PhDr. Marcela Malá, M.A., Ph.D.  
vedoucí katedry

V Liberci dne 19. dubna 2013

## Čestné prohlášení

**Název práce:** Metody hodnocení ústního projevu žáků v hodině anglického jazyka  
**Jméno a příjmení autora:** Růžena Mimrová  
**Osobní číslo:** P08000514

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# METHODS OF ASSESSMENT OF ORAL PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS DURING ENGLISH LESSONS

## Annotation

The final paper titled *Methods of Assessment of Oral Performance of Students during English Lessons* is focused mainly on assessing speaking in EFL classes, during ordinary lessons. The aim of the thesis is to verify, whether a modification of a frequent way of oral examination, commonly known as an “in front of the class examination” into a new method of indirect assessment, provides an effective assessment of spoken performance, and whether this method provides valuable facts about the students’ strengths and weaknesses, and thus serves as a basis for final evaluation. The assumption, that this new method helps to activate and motivate students and also helps to provide a relatively relaxed atmosphere for the performance is verified. The thesis is divided into two parts, the theoretical, which is based on the study of the relevant literature available, and the practical project, which contains both: a lesson plan, during which the “secret examination” was used in order to assess the students’ speaking skills and subsequent reflection and evaluation. Finally, general conclusions and further refinement of the method, based on the results of the practical part, are presented.

## Anotace

Bakalářská práce nazvaná *Metody hodnocení ústního projevu žáků v hodině anglického jazyka* se zaměřuje především na hodnocení mluvení studentů v

průběhu hodin anglického jazyka. Cílem práce bylo ověřit, zda modifikace běžného zkoušení “před tabulí” v metodu nepřímého zkoušení umožní žáky efektivně zkoušet a zároveň poskytne učiteli možnost posoudit hned několik zásadních aspektů ústního projevu najednou. Ověřen je i předpoklad, že tato nová metoda pomáhá aktivovat a motivovat studenty, kterým zároveň poskytuje relativně uvolněnou atmosféru pro výkon. Práce je rozlišena na teoretickou část, která vychází výhradně ze studia literatury dostupné k tématu, a praktický projekt, který obsahuje jak ukázkou hodiny, v níž je metoda tajného zkoušení aplikována, tak následnou reflexi a evaluaci. Obecné výstupy plynoucí z výsledků praktického projektu, stejně jako návrhy na zdokonalení této metody, jsou prezentovány v závěru práce.

## Zusammenfassung

Diese Bachelorarbeit benannte Bewertung mündlichen Ausdruck den Schülern in der Englischstunde und konzentriert sich hauptsächlich auf die Bewertung des Sprechens im Laufe der Englischstunden. Ziel dieser Arbeit war überprüfen indirekte Methode, die die Schüler effektiv Prüfen ermöglichen, und gleichzeitig bietet dem Lehrer beurteilen grundsätzlich zugleich Aspekten mündlichen Prüfungen. Verteidigt auch Vorsetzung, dass diese Methode Schüler aktivieren und motivieren Studenten hilft und zugleich entspannte Atmosphäre für die Leistung bietet Die Arbeit unterscheidet theoretischer Teil, der ausschließlich aus der erreichbaren Fachliteratur geht und praktischer Teil, der vorbildliche Stunde enthält. Hier wird es heimliche Prüfung verwendet, dann folgt die Reflexion und die Evaluation nach. Im

Schluss teil der Arbeit präsentiert die Autorin nicht nur allgemeine Ergebnisse der praktischen Arbeit, aber auch die Vorschläge der Verbesserung der Methode.

## Key words

Assessing speaking, direct x indirect method, speaking skills, assessment criteria, aspects of spoken performance

## Klíčová slova

Hodnocení mluvení, přímá a nepřímá metoda, dovednost mluvit, kriteria hodnocení, aspekty mluveného projevu

## Schlüsselwörter

Die Bewertung der Sprache, direkte und indirekte Methode, die Fertigkeit zu Sprechen, die Kriterien der Sprechweise, die Aspekten der Rede



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# INTRODUCTION

This bachelor thesis entitled *Methods of Assessment of Oral Performance of Students during English Lessons* is focused mainly on assessing speaking in EFL classes, during a lesson, which is a very demanding task due to its' complexity. The bachelor thesis attempts to verify if the frequent way of oral examination commonly known as an "in front of the class examination" can be modified into a new method of indirect assessment, and applied into an ordinary lesson as a variation of assessment ,to be as objective, valuable and reliable as possible.

My concern with this topic is not accidental, for I consider myself to be a co-founder of the indirect method called „secret examination“. It has been a necessity that forced me to try to find an alternative to a frequent way of oral examination, commonly known as an "in front of the class examination" that arises from my experience with teaching. The aim has been to find a method that activates and motivates students effectively, and on the other hand it helps to make the atmosphere in class more friendly, relatively relaxing and informal.

In the theoretical part, I explore features concerning assessing speaking in EFL classes and briefly summarize the relevant theory. This part provides an overview of types of assessment, emphasizes the importance of constructive and meaningful feedback, discusses functions of methods of assessment and the issues of validity, reliability and objectivity, which is necessary to take into consideration to guarantee the quality of testing. The criteria for testing

speaking are also listed and specified. To conclude the theoretical part, the task types implemented in Practical Project are described.

The second part of the bachelor thesis deals with the assumption that “secret examination” could be applied into ordinary lessons as a variant of assessing speaking. The procedure and benefits of the indirect method are explained and the assumption that indirect examination can be useful for teachers is examined. To research whether the “secret method” is also generally appreciated by students, post-lesson reflection is used and then, results are discussed.

Regarding the contribution of my thesis, I believe that the conclusions of my research will be inspiring not only for teachers who are interested in improving ways of assessment, and also for my own professional development, since the work on the thesis discloses a lot of areas that will have to be further investigated and improved.

# 1. Literature Review

## 1.1 Assessment

Assessment has been playing an important role in education for many years. Therefore, the assessment process has been developing and progressing over the years. The form of assessment has been developing according to demands of progress in our educational system, and is progressing in favour of students. In the last twenty years, much has been written about assessment and its forms and methods, about using assessment correctly and about the fact that assessment has a great influence on student's approach to studies, his or her motivation and achievements. Assessment is much more than only a list of analyzed results of students' performances that could be later evaluated by marks. Assessment comprises of many forms, methods and techniques that should be used for one main purpose - to help students in their progress. It is vital to see assessment as one of the most important components in personal progress of students, a complement that helps to identify the real quality of their work and can motivate them strongly.

Not only teachers, but also students and their parents play their part in assessment. Teachers assess students' performances, students assess themselves as well as their classmates and their teachers. Teachers also assess their own pedagogical work. The student's assessment of students' performance allows them to realize if they are making progress or not. Thus, assessment helps students to see and recognize what they have achieved. For

teachers, assessment leads to the improvement of their instructions and they can adjust their lessons according to the learners' needs. Assessing students is of a great importance for their parents who are interested in their children in order to help them with their studies and other duties at school.

## 1.2 Definition of assessment

Assessment is not only a part of the educational process, but also a part of all intended and planned human activities aimed to achieve a goal. People usually want to achieve a goal for their own sake or for somebody else, e.g. to gain higher education, to earn more money, to provide more comfortable lives. If people want to achieve a goal, they usually plan all steps from the beginning to the end. To be better in the next step, they assess their previous behaviour to get better results, or they usually analyze why they weren't successful.

What we actually do when we assess? Slavík (1999,22) describes assessment as a skill. It is a very demanding intellectual skill that allows people to distinguish important phenomena from less important ones. The capability of distinguishing is based on a personal approach, on subjective attitude to the event he or she assesses. Slavík also claims that assessment is connected with values. He explains that it is a process during which learners understand values, discover them, highlight them, compare them, doubt about them and criticize them. Průcha, Walterová and Mareš define assessment as a message from teachers to students, which gives evidence about the level of their achievements in educational process. This is in contrast with the definition made by Angelo who considers assessment as a classroom research to provide

useful feedback for the improvement of teaching and learning (1993, 24). He also thinks that assessment is a preliminary phase in the evaluation process. Angelo's definition of assessment is supported by Cowie and Bell. They define assessment as the process used by teachers and students to recognize and respond to student learning in order to enhance that learning, during the learning (1999,65).

Generally said, assessment is a broad term very often connected with education and teaching. It is understood not only as a tool that is used for assessing the quality of teaching, but also a very important source of information used for the improvement of the quality of learning. Experts on assessment define it as a skill, as an interactive process or as a source of improving learning.

### 1.3 Types of assessment

According to a particular purpose for which assessment is used, two types are commonly defined: summative and formative assessment.

- Summative assessment

The term summative is derived from the Latin word *summa* which means *the main content, sum, total, whole or unit*. The main purpose of this type of assessment is to gain the overview or survey of achieved performance after a period. It is also called the final assessment. Typical examples of summative assessment are midterm tests, revision tests, final year examinations etc. Slavík (1999,17) adds that not only revision or final tests are summative, but also for example short vocabulary tests and other smaller forms of

assessment could be considered summative assessment as well. These tests and quizzes are usually marked, which is a typical feature of summative assessment. Slavík also argues that all verbal characteristics, if they are summarized for example at the end of a school year for the purposes of education, are considered to be a summative assessment.

- Formative classroom assessment

Formative assessment is also labelled as “corrective assessment” or “feedback”. This term is derived from the Latin word *formo* which means *reshape* or *adjust*. A teacher providing formative assessment is actually providing immediate feedback. Formative assessment done immediately, e.g. in class, is usually focused on highlighting strengths and weaknesses in order to improve the following teaching and learning process. Formative assessment is a continuous and complex method of pedagogical work that does not lead to a numerical expression of the result. It is rather a “corrective help” that tends to improve.

Harmer (2007, 379) says that summative assessment is the kind of measurement that takes place to round things off or make a one-off measurement. While formative assessment is done at another level, Harmer uses the term *microlevel assessment* which is relating to the kind of feedback given by the teacher to students in order to do corrections of students’ mistakes immediately after their performance, which improves the next teaching and learning and helps to keep a course in progression. Hedge (2000, 377) adds that formative assessment is concerned with learner’s progress. Its focus is on the



progress of learning. With summative assessment, the focus on attention is on result of learning.

## 1.4 Functions of methods of assessment

The below functions of methods of assessment are chosen according to their relevance to the thesis.

### 1.4.1 Motivational function

Kolář and Šikulová (2005,45) claim that assessment might be a great source of encouragement and it could be a strong stimulus for the next work. However, they describe the assessment as a reward for student's performance, they also point out that assessment as a powerful tool could in the wrong hands of tactless teachers discourage students. They add that assessment very often functions also as a punishment for unsatisfactory performance. They also claim that the motivational function is the most often used function of assessment. In addition, they also strongly warn that assessment is sometimes abused by teachers to keep discipline in class or to hold students' attention during the lesson (ibid).

Čadílek (2005,78) understands assessment as a source of student's motivation in the same way as Kolář and Šikulová and he adds that motivation is an irreplaceable part of schoolwork. Čadílek also explains that if the assessment should function as a motivation, it must be perceived as fair-minded (ibid).

## 1.4.2 Diagnostic function

Assessment is also used to diagnose the level of student's skills and competence via examination, testing or comparison..

## 1.4.3 Educational function

Educational function of assessment is about helping students to form their attitudes and approaches not only to a subject matter but also to themselves. Assessment educates them to bear the responsibility for their studies, to be persistent in studies, diligent and consistent in preparation. Teachers can influence students' self-confidence through assessment.

## 1.4.4 Regulative function

Assessment is used also as a regulation to further student's activities and work. It directly influences the quality of student's performance, the process of the work and its result as well. Assessment can regulate the student's performance through classification, which could be done in oral or in a written form or by marks.

## 1.5 Defining reliability and validity of assessments

Luoma (2004,176) defines reliability as a score consistency. If the scores from a test given today are reliable, they will remain largely the same if the test is given to the same people again tomorrow. Luoma argues that reliability is important because it means that the scores are dependable, so that we can rely on them in decision making. Luoma (2004, 184) adds that validity is the most important consideration in test development, because it refers to the

meaningfulness of the scores. Even if Luoma focuses on the objectivity of tests, a lot of principles concerning validity and reliability can be applied to assessment.

According to Harmer (2007, 322) assessment is valid if it assesses exactly what it is supposed to assess. Kolář and Šikulová (2009, 98) add that validity is a character of assessment, which guarantees that assessment detects all matters and the only matters that are supposed to be assessed and nothing else. Thus, assessment is not valid, for instance, if it is supposed to assess the use of conditional clauses in spoken performance that, however, requires special knowledge of another subject, e.g. history. In contrast, Petty (1993, 358) stated that if the assessment is considered to be legitimate, it must require proof of knowledge of other related subjects according to curriculum. As far as, reliability is concerned to be constancy, stability. Being reliable, a good assessment must give consistent results. Kolář and Šikulová (2009,98) claim that reliability relates to constancy of results of assessment particularly in relation to time and the assessor. For instance, if the same group of students is assessed twice within two days, without reflecting on the first assessment, they should get very similar results on each occasion. Kolář and Šikulová also admits that it is a theoretical model, which in practice may not always work.

## 1.6 Other types of assessment

### 1.6.1 Formal and informal assessment

Valencia (1990,76) defines formal assessment as a type of assessment which provides teachers a systematic way to evaluate how well students are

progressing in a particular instructional program. Formal assessment is always done after the assessor's official information, that he or she is going to assess and what exactly will be assessed. For instance, after completing a theme, a teacher wants to know how well the students have learnt the theme concepts and skills. The most common technique of formal assessment is giving the students a test containing the same theme concept. In formal assessment multiple choice tests, oral tests, long and short answer tests, problem solving tests are usually included. Valencia claims that this type of assessment allows the teacher to evaluate all the students systematically on the important skills and concepts in the theme. For instance, in reading, listening, speaking and writing exercises teacher can thoroughly investigate the student's skills and knowledge or to examine specific skills or strategies taught in a theme (1990, 77).

Informal assessment is based on teacher's observation of the students' work. Informal assessment is defined as "*appraisal by casual observation and other nonstandardized procedures*" (The Literacy Dictionary (IRA). Valencia (1990, 77) describes nonstandardized procedures such as observations, checklists, and portfolios as procedures that are considered to be less stressful for students, because they allow to assess students performance in a comfortable environment; often without the student even realizes he or she is being assessed. Informal assessment includes special activities such as group or individual projects, experiments, oral presentations, demonstrations, or performances. Valencia thinks that „some informal assessments may be drawn from typical classroom activities such as assignments, journals, essays, reports,

literature discussion groups, or reading *logs* (1990,78 ). Informal assessment provides unique opportunity to observe students who are under minimal stress and can work in a relaxed manner. A relaxed student is more opened to teacher's effort for improvement and the teacher can notice qualities of student's character easier than during formal assessment.

In order to complete the whole overview of types of assessment, other forms of assessment will be further mentioned, but they will not be used for the purpose of the thesis:

- ✓ Portfolio assessment has become one of the most popular types of school assessment in recent years. Portfolio assessment is based on the collection of student's work that provides a basis for evaluating progress. Venn defines portfolio as a systematic collection of student's work and related materials that depict a student's activities, accomplishments, and achievements in one or more school subjects (2000, 530-531). There are all kinds of projects, products, publications, artistic performances covered by concrete themes. Portfolio assessment provides teachers an overview of student's progress and a chance to help students with improvement more effectively.
  
- ✓ Authentic assessment is another example of alternative assessment. It is a kind of testing that examines student's skills in situations that are very similar to real situations. It is based on assignments of which solutions are important for practical life.

- ✓ Peer assessment is conducted by students and it means that students assess each other using a list of criteria which was predetermined by the teacher. The system of grading is predetermined by the teacher as well.
- ✓ Self-assessment is similar to peer assessment, but students assess their own progress as language learners as well as their peers. Established set of criteria is essential for sound assessment.
- ✓ Normative assessment is assessment of one student whose work (results, performances) is compared with other students.
- ✓ Diagnostic assessment is very similar to formative assessment, but it is focused on learning disorders detection ( Celce-Murcia, 2001, 129)

## 1.7 Feedback in assessment

No matter what kind of assessment is used to check the learner's progress, without feedback it would be difficult to correct previous mistakes and make any progress. In the assessment process, the report, e.g. feedback, includes information about why the performance was as strong(weak) as it was and describes what could be done and how to improve next performances. There is usually advice how to make the future performance better in feedback. Celce-Murcia (2001,40) defines feedback as a major means by which learners are informed of the accuracy of their language production and their other classroom behavior and knowledge. Celce-Murcia explains (2001,130) that feedback gives learners a sense of their progress and indicates where they need to focus their attention for improvement. Feedback can be done orally or it can

have a written form. Celce-Murcia adds gestures as a way how to express feedback (2001,130). Slavík (1999,16) introduces 3 ways of providing feedback based on comparison. Slavík describes one way as a comparison of student's previous performances. For instance, if an assessor says: "You are much better than yesterday, especially your pronunciation and vocabulary." The teacher must be able to compare each component of student's performance with previous assessment. Then, the teacher can use the results of previous assessment to show to the student where and how he made improvement or if there are the same mistakes as in the previous performance, they can discuss them again. The next way of providing feedback Slavík describes are comparisons with performance of anybody else. For example: "Jan made less mistakes in word order than you." Or "You are better in listening than Jane." The third way of comparison Slavík describes is a comparison with an ideal model, standard or a target that should be introduced to students in detail. For example: "You have obviously achieved the level of A2. Well done, now you rank among the best 10 in the class."

Giving feedback is a very responsible activity, because feedback has a significant impact on learning, on motivation and self-confidence of students; it is essential to see it as one of the most powerful tools that enhance achievement. Feedback should be provided very sensitively, in favour of students. Specialists on issues concerning feedback claim that teachers have a kind of power and they must be really concentrated to use it correctly and only in this case feedback can work as a benefit. Nicol specifies points concerning feedback and defines objectives of feedback in order to explain what makes

feedback beneficial. Nicol says that the main objectives of feedback are to justify to students how their assessment (or mark) was derived. It should identify specific qualities in student's work and it should work as a guide for students to help them to find the answer on question „What steps are necessary to take to improve?“ Feedback should develop student's capability to monitor and regulate their own learning and motivate them. Students must see feedback as their benefit. (2007, 43)

### 1.7.1 Criteria of effective feedback

Nicol argues that feedback provided by assessors must be beneficial. The content of the feedback should be constructive and meaningful. Students must understand the feedback to be able to learn from it. Very important about feedback is timing as well. Feedback should be provided as soon as the assessor can, because only in this case the feedback is valuable and beneficial. Nicol introduced this in 3 apt points:

„To benefit student learning, feedback needs to be:

- constructive. As well as highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of a given piece of work, it should set out ways in which the student can improve their work.
- timely. Give feedback while the assessed work is still fresh in a student's mind, before the student moves on to subsequent tasks.
- meaningful. It should target individual needs, be linked to specific assessment criteria, and be received by a student in time to benefit subsequent work( Nicol, 2007, 44).



## 1.8 English as a foreign language

English as a foreign language, EFL, is a term traditionally used by non-native English language students and speakers in countries where English is generally not a local language of communication. EFL is usually learned in environments where the language of the community and the school is not English (Celce-Murcia,2001,45). *Foreign* derives Middle English *forein*, *forene*, Old French *forain* and Latin *foras*, meaning *outside*. According to Celce-Murcia (2001,26) modern definitions of the term *foreign* includes “situated outside one’s country” or “characteristic of some place other than the one under consideration”.

However, Celce-Murcia (2001,5) describes 4 basic skills learners of English as a foreign language gain during studies and which are regularly tested: listening, speaking, reading, writing. She lists other skills an EFL learner has to master, but since nowadays the main goal of language acquisition is communicative competence, speaking skill is the main focus of the bachelor thesis. Besides, ability of communication is included in Framework Education Program and that’s the main reason why it is essential to pay attention to practice in English classes at lower secondary schools.

## 1.9 Speaking skills

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Current English (2009, 414), speaking is “the action of conveying information or expressing ones’ thoughts and feelings in spoken languages.” Chaney (1998,13), in addition, considers speaking a process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal

or non-verbal symbols in a variety of contexts. Florez (1999,1) adds that “speaking is an “interactive” process, which consists of three main stages “producing, receiving and processing information.” In the English language teaching and learning, speaking is considered a skill to practice. Nunan (2003, 48) adds that speaking skill consists of producing systematic verbal utterance to convey meaning.

In short, speaking is considered to be an action, a process and a skill.

### 1.9.1 Elements of Speaking skills

Goh and Burns (2001, 54) claim that learners must have sufficient knowledge of the language to speak well. They describe grammatical, phonological, lexical and discourse knowledge as elements of speaking skills. Cohen (1994, 266), in addition, focuses on the area when he speaks about the assessment of productive skills. According to Cohen, accuracy is one of the most important criteria to measure learners’s linguistic ability. The area of accuracy includes:

- ✓ Fluency: which is a smooth flow of speech with the use of rhetorical devices to mark discourse patterns.
- ✓ Grammar: that functions as a control of complex and simple constructions.
- ✓ Pragmatic competence: it is defined as a use of conversation-management devices to get the message across.

- ✓ Pronunciation: means a degree of influence of native-language phonological features.
- ✓ Sociolinguistic competence is, according to Cohen, the use of appropriate social registers, cultural references and idioms.
- ✓ Vocabulary: this includes knowledge of vocabulary in the field of interest, e.g. topic or theme.

According to Richards (1992,31) accuracy concerns “the ability to produce grammatically correct sentence.” In contrast to Richards, Thornbury (2000, 47) accepts mistakes as an indication of progress when he says that accuracy in spoken English means that the speaker performs without or with a few errors not only grammar but also vocabulary and pronunciation. Thornbury, when he explains assessment of speaking, describes only three basic areas of accuracy:

- ✓ Grammar: Students use correct word order, tenses, tense agreement,etc. Students do not leave out articles, prepositions, or difficult tenses.
- ✓ Vocabulary: Students have a range of vocabulary that corresponds to the syllabus and are able to use the words in different contexts.

On the other hand, fluency, which is considered as another criterion to measure learner’s speaking skills, is defined by Richards (1992, 41) as “the features which gave speech the qualities of being natural and normal.” To speak fluently means to be able to express one’s ideas without long hesitation. Thornbury (2000, 47) describes the following criteria of fluent speaking:

- ✓ Lack of hesitation: Students speak smoothly, at a natural speech. They do not hesitate long and it is easy to follow what they are saying.
- ✓ Length: Students can put ideas together to form a message or an argument. They can make not only the simplest sentence patterns but also complex ones to complete the task.
- ✓ Independence: Students are able to express their ideas in a number of ways, keep talking and ask questions, etc. to keep the conversation going.

## 1.10 Assessing speaking

Typical assessment at schools is direct testing and the results of direct testing are expressed by marks. Marking, however, cannot express what exactly students know. Therefore, it is necessary to provide verbal assessment according to exactly defined criteria that allows following description of tested competence.

Kolář and Šikulová (2005,83) state that marks can reflect the level of student's knowledge, but they also add that marks cannot inform about as it is called "social qualification" of a student, about his or her abilities to cooperate, creativity or diligence. They claim that marks have mostly a cognitive content, the social dimension is limited (ibid). Kopřiva (1994, 75) sees verbal assessment as an opportunity to define what exactly a student knows and where are his or her deficiencies. Through verbal assessment teachers can recommend what exactly is necessary to revise. By contrast, Kolář and Šikulová admit that school marks can quickly gain a motivational value (ibid). Hrabal (1988,51)

agrees and adds that mark is without any doubt a considerable symbol of success at school.

There have been two approaches to assessing speaking and grading according to criteria. Holistic assessment summarises each relevant aspect of spoken performance into one general numerical rating that covers the whole performance. Even if in holistic evaluation an overall impression of a speaking performance is judged against descriptions on the scale, this description cannot provide useful guidance for students to improve their speaking competence. Analytic assessment, on the other hand, analyzes every individual aspect of the language, one by one, and each aspect is assessed. Analytic scoring provides more useful information about students' speaking abilities, which allows teachers to improve instructions according to the needs of their students. For students, assessing by means of analytical rubric can become an effective means of feedback. The analytic assessment is relevant for the purpose of the thesis.

### 1.11 Objectivity of testing speaking

Validity and reliability are prerequisites for objectivity which is necessary to take into consideration to guarantee the quality of testing. No matter whether analytical or holistic assessment, assessment has to be as objective as possible. Slavík (1999,62) understands objectivity to be truthfulness or verity. Slavík indicates that teachers should try to accomplish assessment that is not influenced by their personality, which can be achieved by explicit criteria that do not allow teachers to make subjective judgement.

Ensuring objectivity of testing speaking may also be achieved by more assessors, clearly formulated questions and assignments and the same conditions for performance. Slavík emphasizes that objectivity is not an aim at all, but only the means of achievement.

## 1.12 Criteria for testing speaking

Generally, criteria for testing spoken performance is defined in order to analyze if the performance is accurate and fluent. It is vital that criteria for testing speaking must be exactly defined in advance. The grading follows the criteria and then they are finally expressed by marks. Students are informed also in advance about the required knowledge for each mark. In this respect, both methods of oral assessment, in front of the class examination and secret examination, are considered to be formal assessment.

Criteria for testing speaking is available in many methodologies for teachers and it is specified as a general rule in consideration of levels of language knowledge that are required for each level and then which is assessed after a performance.

## 1.13 Task types

Considering the objectivity of assessment, it is also important to realize the relationship between the speaking aspects being measured and appropriate tasks used for performing these aspects. Luoma (2004, 139-169) introduces tasks according to their purposes of testing oral skills and divides them into three different reasons.

- ✓ Linguistically oriented purpose of testing speaking includes vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation.
- ✓ Communication-oriented purpose of testing speaking includes expressing and defending an opinion, description tasks and comparing and contrasting tasks
- ✓ Situation-based purpose of testing covers role-plays and simulations

Linguistically oriented purpose of testing speaking is typical of structured speaking tasks. Luoma (2004,158) says about “structured” tasks that they can control closely what exactly the examinees are going to say. Luoma recommends using structured speaking tasks to assess linguistic features, particularly pronunciation and grammar. Luoma also states that the structured questions and answers are limited and all the information needed for answering the questions is usually provided in the task materials (ibid).

Communication-oriented purpose of testing speaking concerns the overall communication activity in the task such as expressing and defending an opinion, telling a narrative or comparing and contracting things or (picture) description (Luoma,2004,146)

Situation-based purpose of testing speaking is based on situation simulations or role-plays (Luoma,2004,151). Role-plays simulate different kinds of communication situations that students can possibly meet outside the school.

All those relevant purposes of testing speaking Luoma introduces are modified according to the purpose of the thesis and implemented in The Practical Project.

This paper attempts to examine the effectiveness of assessing speaking by means of a special method “secret examination” and to answer the following research questions:

- Is it possible to use this method in ordinary lessons?
- Is the method easily, yet objectively conducted?
- Is this method appropriate for pupils?
- Is this method useful for the teacher?



## **2. Practical Project**

The aim of the practical project is to apply the theoretical knowledge concerning assessing speaking, as discussed in the theoretical part, to real examples of an oral examination. The Practical Project deals with a modification of oral examination commonly known as an “in front of the class examination”. This frequent way of examination has been modified into a new method called a “secret examination”. The Practical Project also provides a lesson plan, during which the “secret examination” is used in order to assess speaking skills.

### **2.1 Practical implementation of indirect assessment of speaking**

#### **2.1.1. Reason for assessing speaking**

The purpose of practical implementation of indirect assessment of spoken performance into EFL classes is to diagnose the pupils’ ability to speak in a relaxed, informal, yet motivating atmosphere. For the teacher, this way of testing investigates students’ progress in speaking skills and discovers possible weak sites necessary to be focused on. It helps to activate and motivate students.

#### **2.1.2. The "secret examination"- description**

The method of „a secret examination“ is originally based on an idea of an ordinary examination of student’s knowledge and skills during the whole lesson. The method of „a secret examination“ enables integration of the

examination into the lesson naturally and casually, which allows the teacher to assess not only the student's real knowledge and skills, but also his or her communicative skill during various class activities, for instance while working in pairs on tasks completion. In spite of the fact that this method provides more time for student's knowledge and skills analysis, it is less time consuming than the method of "in front of the class" examination.

The "secret examination" method is based on an analytic way of assessment (see further description of the method) that aims at key features of a student performance. Analytic scoring then enables both quantitative numerical grading and verbal evaluation.

At the beginning of an English lesson the teacher informs the students that one of them is going to be tested by the "secret method". Then the teacher takes a small blank sheet of paper and writes the full name of one student from the class. Nobody, except for the teacher, can see whose name is written down. Then, the paper is put somewhere in the class and nobody can touch it. After this introduction the lesson can be started.

It is essential that the teacher has a list of questions and assignments constructed according to the plan of the lesson. The list of questions and assignment includes themes and issues from previous lessons that the teacher needs to revise, questions including homework or grammar which students' are supposed to know. For instance, if the previous theme was past simple tense and leisure time activities, the teacher's questions and assignments might be: What did you do last weekend? Or where did you go during the last holiday? If a part of the examination is picture description, the picture should show free

time activities that were taught last lesson etc. During the examination the teacher observes and monitors the student's work and writes detailed notes into a record about the student's performance. It is vital that the teacher take rather general notes about other students' performance as well, and correct their speech afterwards, according to the notes in order to keep the identity of a tested student secret.

The student is secretly tested during the whole lesson. The teacher follows the plan of the lesson into which the questions and tasks for the tested student are logically integrated. At the end of the lesson the teacher reveals the name of the secretly tested student and assesses his or her performance according to the criteria for testing speaking. The source for assessment is a list of notes the teacher made during the whole lesson. Then, grading the students' performance follows.

The student who is tested is sitting on his or her common place, working as usual, surrounded by his or her classmates, using all materials as usual: notebooks, student's book, workbook etc. He or she is asked and called up during the whole lesson and can see that the teacher makes notes about his or her performance as well as about any other's performance.

The character of testing speaking (questions and tasks) is adapted according to the lesson plan. For instance, It can be extensive (picture description), it can be interactive (role play) or responsive (one-to-one interview).

### 2.1.3. The "secret examination" - assessment criteria

The criteria for assessing speaking used in this method is based on the system of criteria made by CISKOM<sup>1</sup>. For the purpose of the examination of younger students, exactly for students of the first year at High School, the criteria have been simplified and shortened so that they are suitable for “secret examination”. The aspects of accuracy, fluency, communicative strategies and task completion are assessed (see Figure 1).

Each student who can express ideas clearly and effectively with a high degree of fluency and accuracy can be awarded the highest number of points, which means an outstanding performance. Such a student uses vocabulary appropriately, well-structured language with minor mistakes, only a few grammatical errors and most sentences are correct. There is not much searching for words during the performance. He or she is able to pronounce accurately and is able to vary intonation. Also the task is completed as it had been expected.

In a very good performance a student is obviously competent in using communicative strategies and can understand with little or no difficulty. A little help from a teacher is necessary with using the language for explanation or expressing ideas. There are some moments of searching for words, but he or she has good pronunciation and intonation. He or she uses vocabulary mostly appropriately, well-structured language with minor mistakes, a few

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<sup>1</sup> CISKOM – training for assessors. The system of criteria for assessing the oral part of Maturita state exam.

grammatical errors and more than a half of the sentences are correct. The task is completed as it has been expected.

In a satisfying performance a student is able to express his ideas or opinions, but only in simple terms and there are unnatural long pauses. He or she makes quite a few mistakes in vocabulary that can sometimes interfere with communication. The range of words and expressions is limited. A few pronunciation errors can be done. She or he is able to carry out the tasks with the teacher's help. The task is completed as it has been expected.

In a performance which is considered to be not satisfying the student provides only an inadequate answer or provides only an answer without logical structure. Vocabulary used by the student is not adequate and there are too many mistakes that complicate understanding. His or her communication is filled with pauses and full of pronunciation errors. The student is not able to carry out without teacher's help. The task is completed as it has been expected.

Final grading of a student's performance is done according to the following scale:

3 points in each aspect being assessed:

3 points for outstanding performance

2 points for very good performance

1 point for performance that is satisfying

0 point for performance which is not satisfying

### 2.1.4. The "secret examination": in-class application:

Questions and assignments which the teacher wants to use for testing speaking during the “secret examination” are written in a special form. The teacher uses a specific form during the “secret examination” firstly only for making notes and then, according to these notes, for giving points to count the final score. The following Figure 1 shows the form that is used for “secret examination”.

name:	class:					date:
	3	2	1	0	accuracy	+ -
	3	2	1	0	fluency	
	3	2	1	0	communicative strategy	
	3	2	1	0	task completion	
	3	2	1	0	accuracy	+ -
	3	2	1	0	fluency	
	3	2	1	0	communicative strategy	
	3	2	1	0	task completion	
	3	2	1	0	accuracy	+ -
	3	2	1	0	fluency	
	3	2	1	0	communicative strategy	
	3	2	1	0	task completion	

**Figure 1: Assessment criteria for indirect examination**

The light blue part is intended for questions and assignments. Then the teacher gives points in the purple part and the green part is intended for notes concerning strengths and weaknesses of student’s performance. In each part the same criteria is assessed: accuracy, fluency, communicative strategy and task completion. The teacher also writes the name of a student examined to the heading as well as the date of examination or the class which the examined student attends.

After the assessment of a student's spoken performance is written in the form, the teacher counts up all points in order to give a grade to the examined student. The total is 36 points. The scale of grades is summarized in Figure 2.

Score:	grade:
36 - 31 points	1
30 - 25 points	2
24 - 19 points	3
18 - 12 points	4
11 points and less	5

**Figure 2: Grading rubric**

## 2.2. Lesson plan

Class: 1<sup>st</sup> IT (First year of Information Technology)

Age: 15 – 16 years old

Level: A2/B1

Male: 18

Female: 2

### **Lesson summary focused on aspects being assessed:**

**Functional English:** Understanding, asking for and giving directions, making dialogue, following a route on the map, place description.

**Vocabulary:** buildings, shops, landscapes (rural and urban landscapes), preposition of place.

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Materials:** Maturita Solutions Pre-Intermediate Student's Book, pages 24 and 30. Maturita Solutions Pre-Intermediate Workbook, page 27. Listening CD, tapes 1.23 and 1.29.

**Aims:**

- To develop students' speaking skills
- To develop fluency through a range of speaking activities
- To introduce and practice related vocabulary

**Procedure:**

At the beginning of the lesson students are asked what the date is and the date is written in the right upper hand corner of the board. Then, the class is informed that one of them will be tested today, exactly the spoken performance. The sign „secret examination“ is written below the date. Then, students are informed of the lesson objectives that are also written on the board:

- Places descriptions
- Asking for and giving directions
- Following a route on the map
- Picture description

At this moment, the teacher takes a small blank paper and writes a name of one student from the class. Nobody else can see the paper. The paper is put somewhere in the classroom and nobody can touch it.



## 1) Warming up

After greeting the class the teacher asks:

- „Where do you live and how do you get to school?“
- „Do you like the place where you live?“
- “Is it a town? Is it a village or countryside?”

Teacher asks 3 students. There is also the examined student among those 3 who are asked. The teacher writes words „rural landscapes and urban landscapes“ on the board and next to them other words „countryside, village, town and city. Students are asked to connect these words together according to a relationship with rural and urban landscapes. Then, all students are asked to rewrite these words to their notebooks.

## 2) Working with the Student's book.

Teacher instructs students to open their books, page 24, and asks them to identify what kinds of landscapes they can see in exercise 1 (Figure 3).

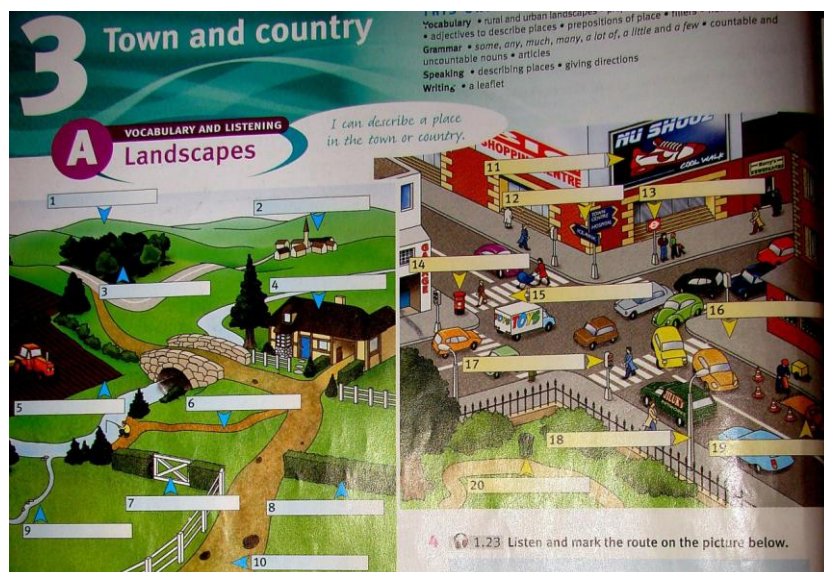
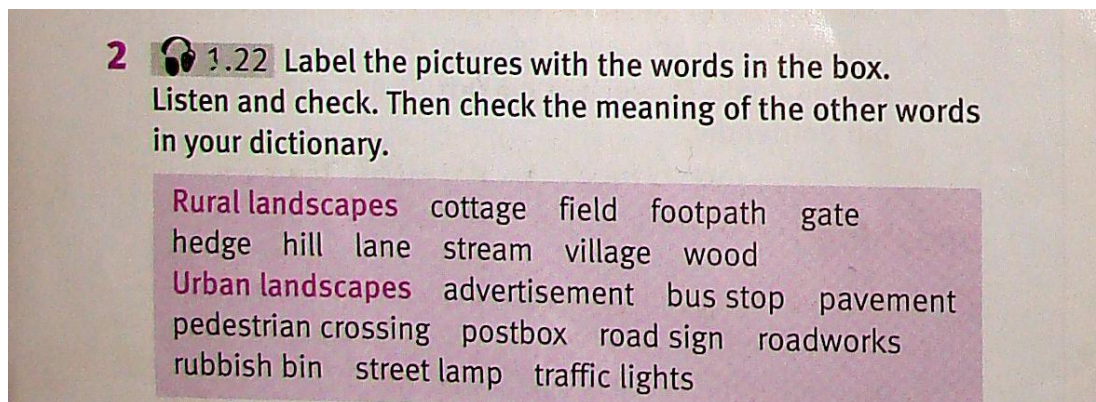


Figure 3: Exercise 1 from the Student's book, p. 24.

After the identification of rural and urban landscapes, the students focus on exercise 2 on page 24 (Figure 4) where vocabulary is introduced. Listening 1.22. is used to do this task. The teacher plays the recording twice. During the first listening students only follow the vocabulary and listen. While the

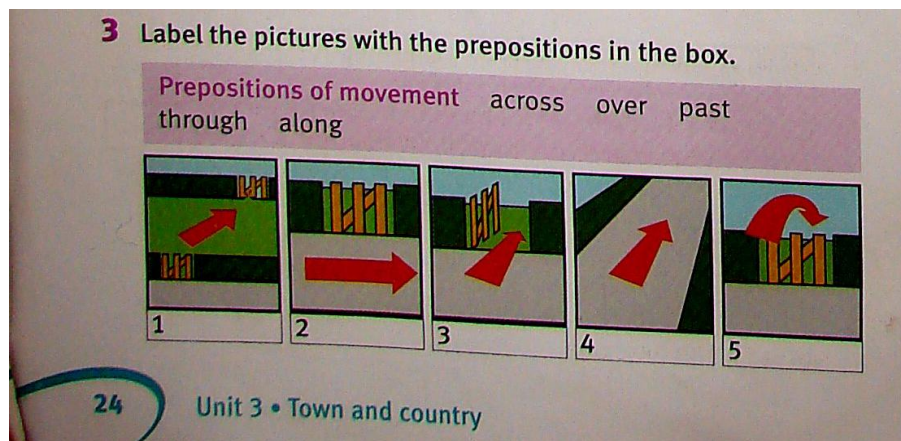


**Figure 4: Exercise 2 from the Student's book, p. 24**

recording is played again, they can repeat the words chorally. Then, all students are instructed to label the pictures with the words from the box. Checking out the results is done by two students.

Then, the next grammatical issue, prepositions of place and movement, follows. The teacher writes on the board "prepositions of place". To demonstrate it the teacher takes a chair and uses it as a teaching aid in the following activity. One volunteer is asked to come to the board and the teacher whispers an instruction to him: "Stand next to the chair". Then the teacher asks the whole class: "Where is Tom standing now?" Students should answer that he is standing next to the chair. Another answer that could be accepted is "by the chair". Teacher writes "next to" on the board. In the same way the teacher revises the other prepositions, like "on", "in front of", "behind" or "in", "at", "above" and "under" and writes them on the board. Then, the students are

asked to label the pictures with prepositions of movement in exercise 3 on page 24 ( Figure 5).



**Figure 5: Exercise 3 from the Student's book, page 24.**

To complete this exercise, the teacher gives students 2 minutes and then using gestures to emphasize the meaning of movement, the whole class is checking it together. In the following assignment, the teacher adds other 3 directions and writes them on the board: “go straight on, turn left, turn right”. The teacher explains the meaning of those directions using gestures. For instance, the teacher can walk in the classroom between two rows of desks and says: “We walk across the field and in front of the lake we turn right.” After this demonstration the students focus on exercise 4 on page 24, where they will listen to a recording and mark the route on the picture (Figure 6). The recording is played twice. After the second listening the teacher can ask several students where the destination in the picture is? One of the asked students can be the examined student.

The teacher models the activity of giving directions using the picture in exercise 4 (Figure 6) by telling the class that the teacher has chosen a place in the picture for the students to guess and gives directions. The students follow them and guess the place. Then, the teacher asks all students to work in pairs in the same way for 3 minutes. During this activity the teacher is walking through the classroom and listening, if necessary also correcting the students' performance. After the 3 minutes the examined student is asked to give directions and except for his partner, the rest of the class should guess the place in the picture. Then, they are asked to show a short role play. For instance: How can I get to the church in that village in the picture? Then, other 2 students do the same.

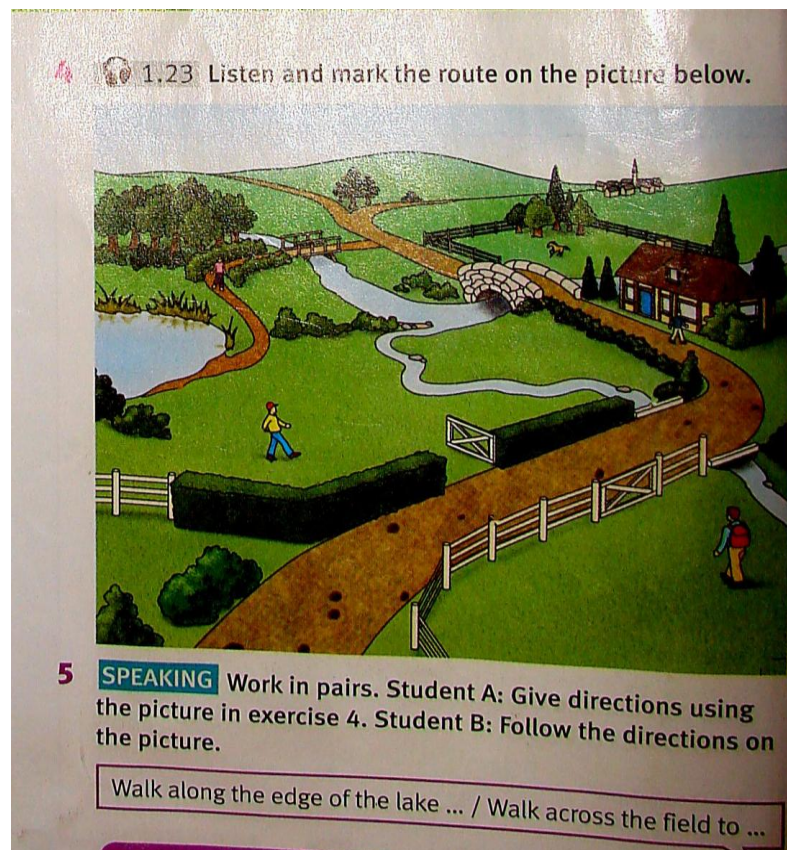


Figure 6: Exercise 4 from the Student's book, page 24

The teacher asks the secretly examined student and one of his or her classmates to do a special assignment. These two students get two pictures (Figures 7 and 8) and their assignment is to describe them in the way that other classmates can make a rough draft of them according to their description. They get 3 minutes to get ready for the performance, they are allowed to use a



**Figure 7: Picture of landscape to describe**



**Figure 8: Picture of horse-riding to describe**

dictionary during the preparation.

While the two examined students are getting ready for their performance, the rest of the class opens their workbooks on page 22 and focus on exercise 2 (Figure 9). They complete the sentences with prepositions of movement and match them to the pictures.

1. Mark walked .... the postbox.
2. Sylvia ran.... the pavement.
3. Jamie went ..... the bridge.
4. Beth rode ..... the fence.
5. Jess drove ..... the gate.

To provide two examined students more time, if necessary, now the teacher can give the whole class homework, which is exercise 1, the same page (complete a puzzle).



Figure 9: Exercise 2 from the Workbook, page 22.

All students are instructed to close their books and workbooks and take notebooks or papers, because they will make a draft of a picture according to the description of the two students who are now ready to speak. The examined student starts his or her performance.

### **Revelation of the secret name**

At the end of the lesson the secret name of the examined student, which is written on the paper, is revealed. According to the notes the teacher made during the whole lesson the student's performance is assessed. After the assessment and providing feedback, the student is given points, the teacher counts up the points and grades his or her performance.

A significant and inseparable part of assessment and feedback is to emphasize all goals and achievements of the examined student, praise him or her for the progress he or she made and motivate him or her for the next work.



name: Tom D., Unit 3	class:	1.IT		date: 12th November 2013		
Where do you live and how do you get to school?	3	2	1	0	accuracy	Well, I live in a small...
Do you like the place where you live?	3	2	1	0	fluency	I go to school by bus
Is it a town? Is it a village or countryside?	3	2	1	0	communicative strategy	I like my hometown but I <b>not</b> want
	3	2	1	0	task completion	<b>to</b> live there... <b>Help needed once</b>
	3	2	1	0	accuracy	walk across <b>the</b> field, turn left
giving directions	3	2	1	0	fluency	go over <b>the</b> bridge, over the river
(describe the route)	3	2	1	0	communicative strategy	again, pass( <b>t</b> ) the cottage
	3	2	1	0	task completion	stream + <b>articles, prepositions</b>
	3	2	1	0	accuracy	In the picture there is/are
picture description	3	2	1	0	fluency	outside, wooden cottage, forest,
	3	2	1	0	communicative strategy	present continuous correctly used
	3	2	1	0	task completion	<b>only 2x articels missing</b>
<b>28 points</b>						

Figure 11: Retyped sample form from “secret examination” with notes and given points



### **3. Analysis of results**

The aim of this thesis was to concentrate on assessing speaking in EFL classes. In the theoretical part I explored features concerning assessing speaking and I attempted to briefly summarize the relevant theory.

In the practical project I aimed to explain the procedure and benefits of the method called a “secret examination” and proved that it can be used in ordinary lesson as an effective method of assessing speaking during which pupils are speaking in a relatively relaxed, informal, yet motivating atmosphere.

#### **3.1 Evaluation from the teacher’s point of view**

As for the practicality of the method, the project proved that assessing speaking by means of the “secret examination” can be used in ordinary lessons without any modifications of these lessons. However, certain preconditions proved to be crucial for the effectiveness of the method:

- 1) Questions and assignments must be prepared so that they correspond with the lesson theme and alternatively proceed from previous lessons, but also they must steer students to react and speak, which requires precise preparation.
- 2) Questions and assignment must smoothly fit into the context of the lesson to not disturb the nature of the lesson.

As far as the objectivity of assessing pupils' speaking competence, the "secret examination", the project proved that:

- 1) Criteria, which was prepared for assessing speaking, has been considered to cover the important aspects of spoken performance but it has been reduced so that they allow recording the student's performance.
- 2) In addition to individual aspects it is necessary to prepare an extra place for other notes if this is a matter that cannot be recorded using the criteria, for instance, a significant linguistic error or other issues that are needed to be mentioned in the feedback. Scoring system and subsequent marking must be designed in the way that following derivation of the final mark was easy and fast.

Finally, as assessment without feedback would lose its purpose, the essential part of assessing pupils' speaking performance is a final word of the teacher. The practical project proved that the format of note taking system provided enough data for feedback and that it was effective to do feedback at the beginning of the lesson. It is beneficial if the pupil immediately knows if he or she succeed and how well. Also the information that the teacher gets from the examination is used immediately as a prompt feedback, which becomes so authentic.

What proved correct was my assumption that "secret examination" could be applied into ordinary lessons as a variant of assessing speaking. I

pursued relevant problems I faced while preparing the lesson plan focused on assessing speaking. It proved to be difficult to think out thoroughly the structure of the lesson so that the implementation of questions and assignments for examination would correspond with the central theme of the lesson and also keep the examination objective, valuable and responsible.

### **3.2 Evaluation from the pupils' point of view**

I attempted to map the students' attitudes towards the "secret method". I put 3 different pictures of simplified human face grimaces on tables in our school canteen and told the students to sit around that table with the picture of a human face that aptly expresses their approach to the "secret method". These pictures clearly expressed a satisfied face, then a calm, neutral face and the last one expressed unhappy and angry face. There were 20 students in the class where the "secret method" has been conducted. 13 of them sat around the table with the picture expressing satisfied face, 3 students chose the table with a calm, neutral face and only 4 students chose the table with the unhappy and angry face. The outcome of this way of reflection supported the assumption that the "secret method" is positively accepted by the students. During the following discussion with these students I found out the reasons why the group of 4 students chose the unhappy and angry face. They said that they are dissatisfied with all kinds of assessment, no matter if it is done in front of the class, indirectly, orally or in the written form. They also emphasized that promptness of other classmate's answers and reactions could discourage those, who need more time to arrange thoughts and to get ready to answer while all the

others are raising their hands and they cannot wait answering. This was a very interesting point, which led me to be careful in planning and timing the questions and assignments, so that they would be provided enough time to prepare and respond. The other 3 students, who chose the table with the calm, dispassionate face, claimed that it does not matter at all, which form of testing is done during lessons, they do not feel stress neither during the “secret method” nor during “in front of the class examination” or testing. They did not give any preference. The group of 13 students who sat around the table with the picture expressing the satisfied face consider the “secret method” to be a very tactful way of examination. They highly appreciate that they feel less stressed during the examination, because they are not forced to speak in front of the rest of the class, which they regard as an embarrassing way of examination. 7 of them added that the method of “secret examination” is considered to be entertaining for them, because they usually attempt to guess whose name is written on the paper.

## 4. Conclusion

The results of the practical implementation of assessing speaking by means of the “secret method” showed that this method is easily conducted, useful for teachers, and it is generally appreciated by students. However, putting the “secret examination” method into practice requires an experienced teacher, who is able to manage the teaching and learning process, and at the same time assess a particular student performance. For experienced teachers this method can become an effective, feasible tool for assessment. This method is not recommended for teachers at the very beginning of their teaching career, because it requires experience and a command of the routine of the whole procedure of this method.

Apart from the necessity to assess students, this method activates and motivates them effectively, which helps to make the atmosphere in class more friendly, yet slightly competitive and thus dynamic.

To conclude, there is no doubt that assessing speaking in EFL classes is a very demanding task. The investigation helped to verify thoroughly, and objectively if the method of assessing speaking is appropriate for EFL classes. The results showed that it will be necessary to modify and improve this method to make it more universal and effective.

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