

## Exploring Assessment Criteria for Oral Interactions in Japanese Elementary English Education: An Intervention Study

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This study aims to explore the challenges of establishing clear assessment criteria for *oral interactions*, guided by the research question, "What are the potential criteria for assessing oral interactions among Japanese elementary school students?" Since the initiation of formal foreign language education in elementary school in Japan, predominantly focused on English, in 2020, the curriculum has strongly emphasized oral communication. This approach aligns with the Basic Language Cognition (BLC) theory proposed by Hulstijn (2015), which underscores the importance of oral input and interaction in the acquisition of basic structures and vocabulary for beginners.

However, the assessment of oral interactions in Japan faces significant hurdles, notably in defining clear, assessment criteria. This intervention study involved 87 fifth-grade students, who were divided into two experimental groups and one control group. In January 2022, they participated in a restaurant role-play activity, preceded by regular English lessons where they learned five formulaic expressions for ordering in a restaurant. The experimental groups received explicit instruction on communication strategies (CS) and fluency enhancement. The role-play was conducted in separate rooms, one-on-one with a language instructor, with students recording their performances for evaluation. Transcriptions were analyzed based on 18 initial items, including aspects of fluency (speed, breakdown, repair) and the frequency of CS use. However, only four items showed significant differences between the groups, as determined by the Mann-Whitney U test.

This study sheds light on the complexity of assessing *oral interactions* among young, novice learners, taking into account factors such as the relationship between interlocutors, various learning conditions (e.g., absenteeism), and individual differences. It suggests the potential of using analytical assessment items, like the four identified items related to mastering formulaic expressions, for effective and practical measurement in classroom settings. This indicates a path forward for integrating analytical assessment into language education, potentially enhancing teaching strategies and assessment methodologies through a more nuanced understanding of student performance in oral interactions.

Hulstijn, J. H. (2015). *Language proficiency in native and non-native speakers: Theory and research*, *Language Learning & Language Teaching* (Vol. 41). John Benjamins.