Assessing Speaking SIG

The testing and assessment of spoken language is often avoided because of its complex and labour-intensive nature (Luoma, 2004). Of the four language skills, however, speaking is the most needed in terms of population mobility within Europe, which is buttressed by the abundance of illustrative scales provided in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for speaking, compared to the other skills. Bachman and Alderson (2004) echo this by stating that "the ability to speak in a foreign language is at the very heart of what it means to be able to use a foreign language" (p. ix). This SIG is therefore complements EALTA's support for teachers and testers of productive skills.

Various presentations at the most recent EALTA annual conferences have highlighted the topicality of issues related to the assessment of spoken language (e.g. Bosker et al., 2012; De Jong, 2012; Bernstein et al., 2013), indicating the need for a forum to discuss such topics as developing and validating rating scales, issues of the construct of speaking as opposed to that of other language skills (particularly writing and listening), efficient task design, i.e. questions such as what tasks elicit the most authentic performances to demonstrate a candidate's true competence in the foreign language, and the use of psychometrics in supporting these procedures.

This SIG is multilingual as the assessment of speaking is not only limited to English as a Foreign language (EFL). Similar to the Assessing Writing SIG, this group also focuses on: rater behaviour, methods and issues of rater training and benchmarking spoken performances to guide models of rater training in various countries, contexts and institutions. Investigating approaches to linking the assessment of speaking to the CEFR are also high on the agenda.

The SIG is intended to promote the following objectives of EALTA:

- To share professional expertise in testing and assessment of speaking
- To increase public understanding of speaking assessment
- To improve speaking testing and assessment practices in Europe and beyond
- To provide training in speaking testing and assessment
- To make expertise in speaking testing and assessment readily available for the solution of assessment problems

The target group intended to be served by this SIG are practicing classroom teachers at all levels, from young learners to tertiary education and the workplace, teacher trainers, assessment specialists and researchers.

The following people are committed to this SIG:
Carol Spöttl, University of Innsbruck (SIG moderator)
Jayanti Banerjee, CaMLA (deputy SIG moderator)
Nivja de Jong, Utrecht University (deputy SIG moderator)
Benjamin Kremmel, University of Innsbruck (deputy SIG moderator)
Kathrin Eberharter, University of Innsbruck (deputy SIG moderator)