

Title of Project:

Rater cognition and behavior in speaking assessment

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Abstract:

Performance tests typically employ raters to produce scores; accordingly, an understanding of how and why raters make particular scoring decisions is necessary to interpret what scores mean. While self report techniques have been used to illuminate rater decision-making in writing assessment contexts, few such studies have examined speaking tests, where the demands placed on the rater may be quite different. In this study experienced teachers of English will score recorded TOEFL iBT speaking test responses prior to training and in three subsequent sessions, and for a subset of judgments, raters will report what they were thinking as they made scoring decisions. Qualitative analysis of this longitudinal recall data will be used to examine how decision making processes change as raters become more familiar with the scoring context. Finally, the study will examine the proposition that judgments of magnitude are based on comparisons to other examples of performance rather than the application of an absolute internalized scale. Specifically, the study will determine whether previously judged test taker responses are used as points of reference when scoring (i.e., anchor bias), and whether discrimination between performances is improved when side-by-side comparisons are made as opposed to when making judgments independently. The project is intended to contribute to a better understanding of the psychological nature of rater judgment, clarify the contribution of rater decision making processes to scoring patterns, and illuminate how novices develop into experienced raters, which may have implications for rater training.