

**Speech and multimedia Transmission Quality (STQ);
Specification and measurement of
speech transmission quality;
Part 1: Introduction to objective comparison measurement
methods for one-way speech quality across networks**

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Reference

REG/STQ-00105-1

Keywords

interworking, quality, speech, testing,
transmission, voice**ETSI**650 Route des Lucioles
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Foreword

This ETSI Guide (EG) has been produced by ETSI Technical Committee Speech and multimedia Transmission Quality (STQ).

The present document is part 1 of a multi-part deliverable covering the specification and measurement of speech transmission quality, as identified below:

- Part 1: "Introduction to objective comparison measurement methods for one-way speech quality across networks";**
- Part 2: "Mouth-to-ear speech transmission quality including terminals";
- Part 3: "Non-intrusive objective measurement methods applicable to networks and links with classes of services".

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1 Scope

The present document is part 1 of a series of documents on the specification and measurement of mouth-to-ear (also end-to-end) speech transmission quality. Its main objective is to describe objective comparison-based methods and systems for measuring mouth-to-ear speech quality in networks. Apart from this, it gives an overview on other important aspects of mouth-to-ear speech quality. As the need arises, these other aspects will be covered in more detail in subsequent parts of the present document. Although some of the models described in the present document are superseded the description of the models is kept for information.

The present document gives an overview of the methods available for measuring one-way speech transmission quality. Its purpose is to give information and guidance primarily for operators, users, consumer organizations and regulators who wish to measure or compare the speech transmission quality provided by different networks. The need for the present document has been increased by:

- the liberalization of voice services, which has introduced alternative competing providers of voice services;
- the introduction of new mobile and IP based technologies;

which has increased the range of services and cost/quality options for users.

The present document applies to both fixed and mobile networks with or without terminal equipment connected to the network. It applies only for narrowband (i.e. between 300 Hz and 3 400 Hz) communications. In principle, comparison methods can be used for IP-based (internet protocol-based) networks, but further work is needed on the calibration of the methods for such networks. The present document describes:

- methods for measurements of individual impairments or combinations of impairments to be made at acoustic or electrical interfaces;
- methods for combining measures of different impairments into a single objective measure;
- methods for predicting the subjective effect of impairments that would be perceived by users.

The methods in the present document assume that subjects with normal hearing have been involved in the test. Therefore, the instrumental methods estimate the perceived speech quality of persons with normal hearing. For each method, the guide contains a general description to highlight the main points, and provides references for more detailed information. The present document does not contain detailed specifications of the individual methods.

The present document concentrates on *one-way* speech quality in networks. It gives no guidance on how to evaluate systems that include equipment such as echo cancellers or in which interactive impairments such as talker echo are significant. The perceived quality in such cases depends not only on the one-way performance, but very much on the behaviour of the equipment under duplex conditions; specifically, the influence of double-talk and delay needs to be considered.

Although all assessments of overall speech quality are ultimately subjective because they depend on the user's opinion, a distinction is made between:

- subjective methods, which involve real time user assessment; and
- objective methods, which use stored information on the user's assessment and therefore involve some degree of calibration.

Objective methods for the evaluation of speech quality fall into three categories:

- a) *Comparison Methods*: Methods based on the comparison of transmitted speech signal and a known reference.
- b) *Absolute Estimation Methods*: Methods based on the absolute estimation of the speech quality (i.e. there is no known reference signal); e.g. INMD (ITU-T Recommendation P.561 [i.16]).
- c) *Transmission Rating Models*: Methods that derive a value for the expected speech quality from knowledge about the network; e.g. ETSI Model (ETR 250 [i.1], ITU-T Recommendation G.107 [i.14]).

The classification of assessment methods is depicted in figure 1.

Practical implementations of test equipment may include combinations of these methods. The focus of the present document is on comparison methods (intrusive methods), which currently yield the most accurate results. The other categories are only covered in short overviews, although they may be preferable for certain applications.

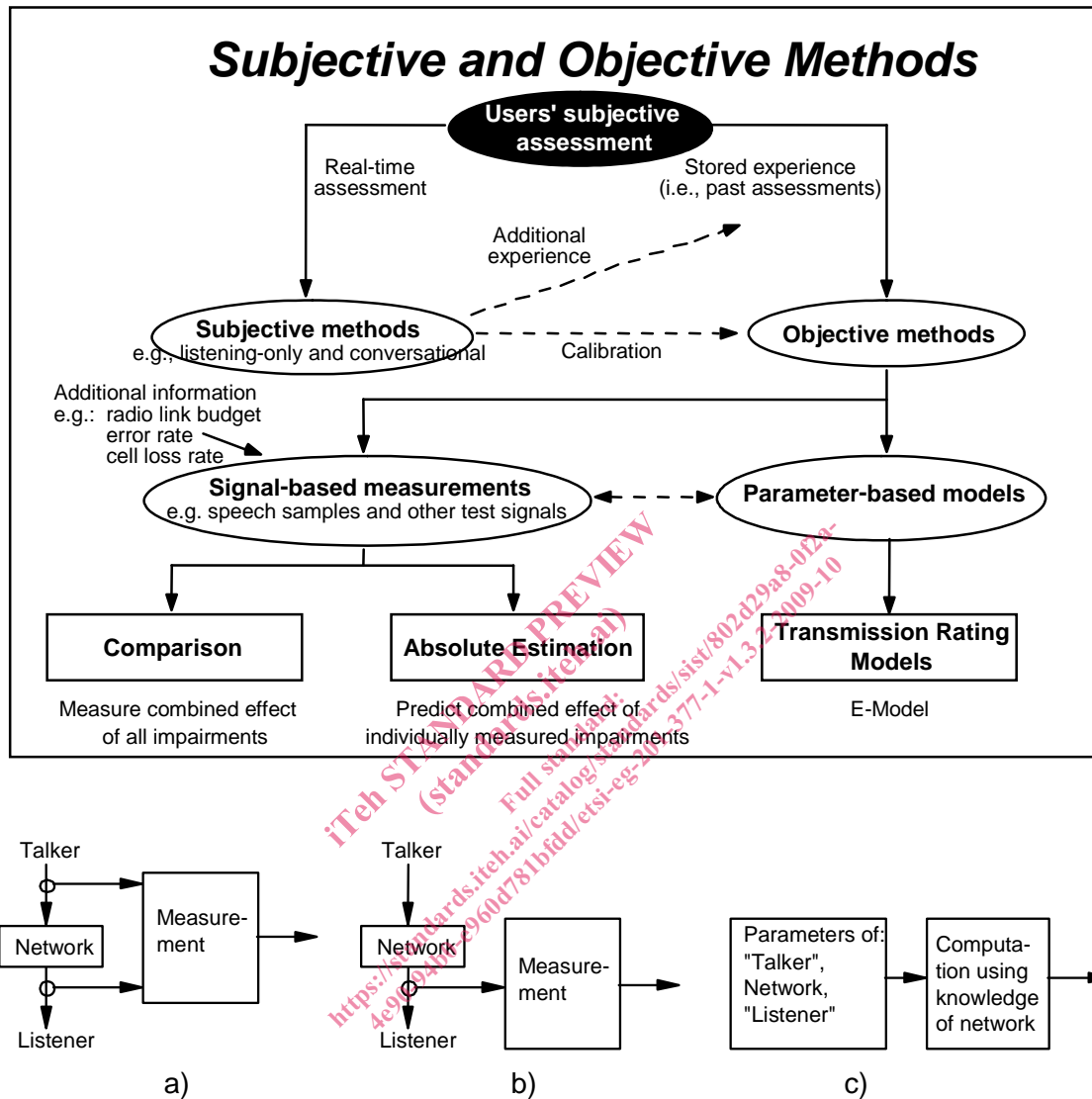


Figure 1: Classification of assessment methods showing:
a) Comparison methods,
b) Absolute estimation methods,
c) Transmission rating models

NOTE: As an ETSI Guide, the present document provides guidelines for test methods that may be implemented. However, a test method and especially quality models can only be applied in the way and within the scope defined in the reference standard. A "Warning" indicates when this applies.

2 References

References are either specific (identified by date of publication and/or edition number or version number) or non-specific.

- For a specific reference, subsequent revisions do not apply.
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2.1 Normative references

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of the present document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For non-specific references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

Not applicable.

2.2 Informative references

The following referenced documents are not essential to the use of the present document but they assist the user with regard to a particular subject area. For non-specific references, the latest version of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

- [i.1] ETSI ETR 250: "Transmission and Multiplexing (TM); Speech communication quality from mouth to ear for 3,1 kHz handset telephony across networks".
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- [i.4] ETSI EG 202 396-1: "Speech and multimedia Transmission Quality (STQ); Speech quality performance in the presence of background noise; Part 1: Background noise simulation technique and background noise database".
- [i.5] ETSI EG 202 396-2: "Speech Processing, Transmission and Quality Aspects (STQ); Speech quality performance in the presence of background noise; Part 2: Background noise transmission - Network simulation - Subjective test database and results".
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3 Definitions and abbreviations

3.1 Definitions

For the purposes of the present document, the following terms and definitions apply:

bark: frequency unit in the perceptual domain; e.g. frequencies at 3, 4, and 5 Bark are perceived as equally-spaced

cepstrum: cepstrum of a signal is defined as the inverse Fourier transform of the logarithm of the power spectrum of that signal

NOTE 1: See figure 5.

NOTE 2: Linear distortions of a signal (e.g. delay, echo) are additive in the cepstral domain.

cognitive: pertaining to higher layers of human reception; e.g. interpretation of speech

perceptual: pertaining to lower layers of human reception; e.g. processing of sound signals

psycho-acoustic: pertaining to acoustic processing particular to the human sound perception system; e.g. masking of adjacent frequency components

3.2 Abbreviations

For the purposes of the present document, the following abbreviations apply:

ACR	Absolute Category Rating
ANOVA	ANalysis Of VAriances
ATM	Asynchronous Transfer Mode
CCR	Comparison Category Rating
CD	Cepstral Distance
CDI	Cochlear Discrimination Information

CMOS	Comparison Mean Opinion Scores
DC	Direct Current
DCME	Digital Circuit Multiplication Equipment
DCR	Degradation Category Rating
DFT	Discrete Fourier Transform
DMOS	Degradation Mean Opinion Scores
FFT	Fast Fourier Transform
FMNB	Frequency Measuring Normalizing Block
GSM	Global System for Mobile communication
HATS	Heads And Torso Simulator
INMD	In-service, Non-intrusive Measurement Device
IP	Internet Protocol
ISDN	Integrated Services Digital Network
LAR	Log-Area Ratios
LPC	Linear Prediction Coefficient
MNB	Measuring Normalizing Blocks
MOS	Mean Opinion Score
PAMS	Perceptual Analysis/Measurement System
PCM	Pulse Code Modulation
PESQ	Perceptual Evaluation of Speech Quality
POTS	Plain Old Telephony Service
PSQM	Perceptual Speech Quality Measure
PSTN	Public Switched Telephone Network
QoS	Quality of Service
QSDG	Quality of Service Development Group
SNR	Signal-to-Noise Ratio
TMNB	Time Measuring Normalizing Block
TOSQA	Telecommunication Objective Speech Quality Assessment

4 Overview

Today, telecommunication is strongly influenced by three major facts:

- the liberalization of telecommunication, i.e. the separation between regulatory bodies and operators;
- the splitting of operations into network providers and service providers; and
- the increase of international traffic due to the internationalization of trade and business.

In addition to these facts, there is also a strong influence due to technical evolution. The most important trends are the move from fixed networks to mobile networks, but also from conventional switched PSTN and ISDN networks to packet-based networks such as the Internet. These technical trends will make it necessary to extend the applicability of the methods described below in order to cover speech quality impairments from "new" types of degradations, such as packet losses and variable delay.

The liberalization as well as the splitting of operations lead to new legal/commercial/technical interfaces, which need a definition both in the contractual and technical sense:

- regulators need a measurement basis in order to specify the requirements which "their" network operators have to fulfil;
- operators of private networks (e.g. corporate networks, closed user groups) need a measurement basis as well for double-checking transmission planning issues for the interconnection of private networks with the public ISDN/PSTN; and
- service providers want to compare different network providers concerning their price/performance ratio.

In all cases the traditional methods for speech quality assessment based on subjective rating of speech samples are far too expensive, too slow and lack the precise repeatability.

The internationalization of traffic as well as the multitude of network providers lead to the fact that in many cases a phone call is routed through several networks, where these networks are based on different technologies (fixed analogue or digital, ATM, Internet, mobile networks, satellite links, etc.). The concatenation of multiple different networks is no longer restricted, and the resulting effects on speech quality are not well covered up to now.

4.1 Objective

The aim of the present document is to give:

- general information on mouth-to-ear speech quality, and the factors to be included in its evaluation (see clause 5);
- information on subjective reference assessment methods, which are essential to calibrate objective methods, showing what results can be obtained (see clause 6 and annex C);
- information on the objective comparison measurement methods available and how they work, especially the most recent methods (see clause 7);
- overview of other assessment methods (see clauses 8 and 9).

In a second part of the present document (to be developed later), the criteria for the evaluation of such objective measurement systems will be specified, namely:

- requirements concerning the technical characteristics of speech quality measurement;
- methods to test the conformity of these methods to the subjective reference assessments; and finally
- criteria to compare and evaluate the current methods.

4.2 Related work in standardization

On all of the above mentioned topics a lot of work has already been done in the past by a number of standards bodies:

- ETSI TC STQ <http://portal.etsi.org/STQ>
This Technical Committee is responsible for the "co-ordination, production (where appropriate) and maintenance of end-to-end speech quality related deliverables" (TC/STQ Terms of Reference).
- 3GPP SA
The work done in 3GPP SA 4 concentrates on codec quality in mobile networks (in particular for Half Rate, Enhanced Full Rate and Adaptive Multi-Rate codecs) and therefore is not primarily oriented towards mouth-to-ear speech quality aspects. However, it is a very important source of information especially for the subjective rating of speech samples and for the characteristics of speech samples to be used for assessment and measurement. Note that this work done in SA 4 was previously performed by ETSI SMG 11.
- ITU-T Study Group 12
The work in ITU-T Study Group 12 is focused both on terminal and acoustic tests and on mouth-to-ear network aspects. Several questions are addressing mouth-to-ear speech quality issues. The details of the questions can be found:
<http://www.itu.int/ITU-T/studygroups/com12/index.asp>
- ITU-T Study Group 2/QSDG
The "Quality of Service Development Group" is a subgroup of ITU-T Study Group 2. Its members are network operators and manufacturers from all over the world.
According to their Terms Of Reference, the tasks of QSDG are the following:
 - encourage participation in QoS activities;
 - identify and develop performance monitoring and evaluation;
 - improve QoS, include practices in TSS documentation;
 - disseminate information about QoS techniques and procedures;