INTERACTIONAL COMPETENCE (IC): AT THE CROSSROADS OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (SLA) AND LANGUAGE TESTING

Cambridge Assessment
English

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Interaction

Dynamic
Co-constructed
Reactive and proactive
Shaped by contextual and cognitive factors

Human beings are "designed for dialogue rather than monologue"
(Garrod & Pickering, 2004, p. 8)

Interaction is the "primordial site of sociality"
(Schegloff, 1986, p. 112)

# Influences on the evolution of IC

Pedagogic

Influences on the evolution of IC

Pedagogic

Socio-political

Influences on the evolution of IC

Pedagogic

Socio-political
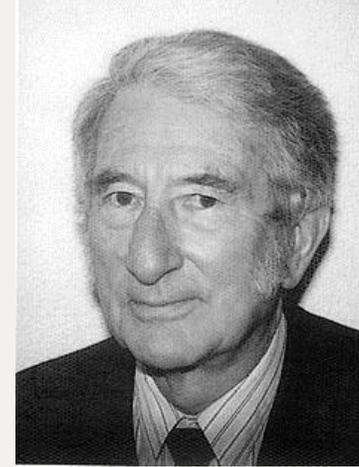
Theoretical

Influences on the evolution of IC

Pedagogic

Socio-political

Theoretical

Methodological

Influences on the evolution of IC

3

[Yeah, exactly]

[And] and maybe it could be also (0.5) be a problem for (0.5) ahm (0.5) for the water and, and, how can I [say, ahm] not only water but

4   The environment in gen[eral, I] mean=

[General]

5

=Yes, indeed=

6   =cars are starting to come and like ex-haust fumes and stuff like that=

7   yeah

=Yes, and everything in, in, (0.5) maybe it was a wood before or some-thing like that. (1) they had to ahm burn down ahm (0.5) and where are ah the animals who who lived there in the past. (0.5) It's also the same with **the last picture**, [isn't it?]

yeah

8   [Yeah], I think it's li:ke, (0.5) I'm not sure but there's like a specific word for this, that the trees and there's like a mudstream a:nd, it's,

(1)

9

Oh yes, [I see]

10   [I think] it's cause by, (0.5) I'm not sure, do you know?=

11

=Yes, It's because they cut the trees down and then a:h it's like hm yes=

12   =Exactly, when it starts to rain, [there's like] a mudstream, uh, hm, I don't know

[Yes, indeed]

Interaction = "the matrix in which acquisition takes place" (Ellis, 2005, p. 219)

- negotiation of meaning (Long, 1986)

- construction of new forms and functions (Lantolf, 2000)

- development of pragmatic competence (DeKeyser, 1998; Ellis, 2005)

- development of implicit knowledge (DeKeyser, 1998; N Ellis, 1998)

- primary source for learning discourse management skills (Ellis, 1995; Johnson, 1995)

# Interactional competence and SLA

Conceptualising IC for testing purposes

- Co-constructed interaction
- Broad range of speech functions
- Cognitive demands
- Turn-taking management
- Topic development
- Interactive listening
- Test authenticity & validity

(Brooks, 2009; Ducasse & Brown 2009; Galaczi, 2008; Gan 2010; Kormos, 1999; May, 2009; O'Sullivan, Weir, & Saville, 2002; Taylor, 2000)

Interactional competence
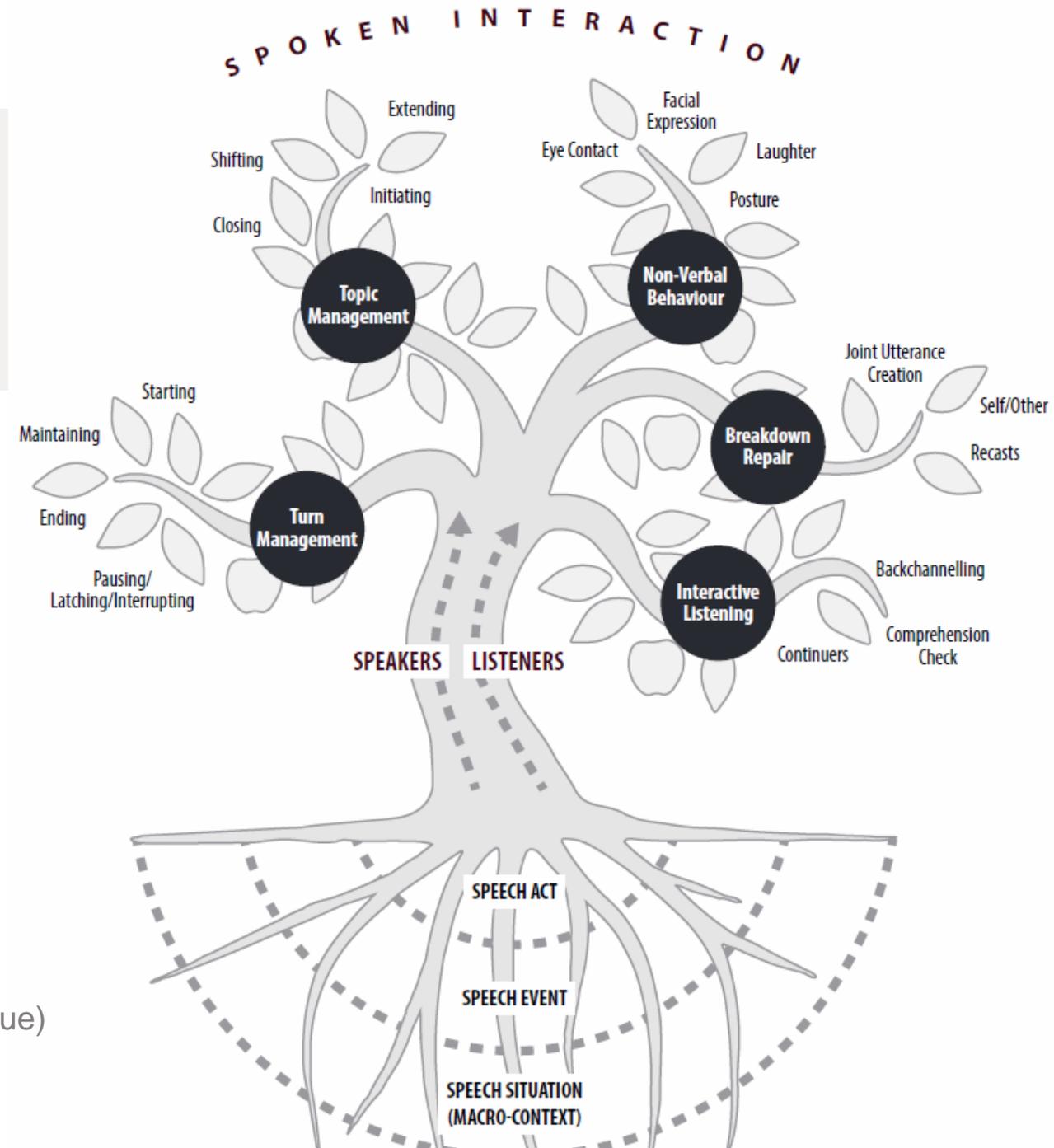
(Galaczi & Taylor, 2018, *Language Assessment Quarterly* special issue)

Tapping into IC: challenges for testers

Test authenticity vs test reliability

The interlocutor effect

The role of non-verbal communication
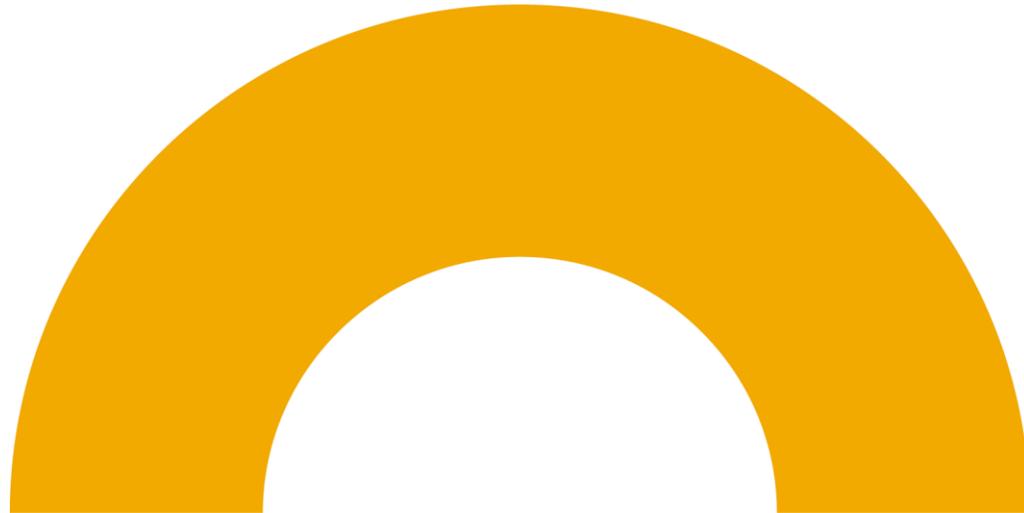
Authenticity and reliability in interactional tests

An uneasy partnership

Co-constructed interaction is
   complex and variable
   dynamically shaped
   difficult to predict or control

Interviewer variability: different behaviours across interviewers

(Brown, 2003; Brown & Hill, 1998; Lazaraton, 1996)

The interlocutor effect (both examiner and peer)

A threat to validity

Personality, gender, familiarity, cultural background, talkativeness …
(Berry ,1993; Chambers, Galaczi, & Gilbert, 2012; Davis, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2002; Nakatsuhara, 2013; van Moere & Kobayashi, 2004)

We are all linguistic chameleons!
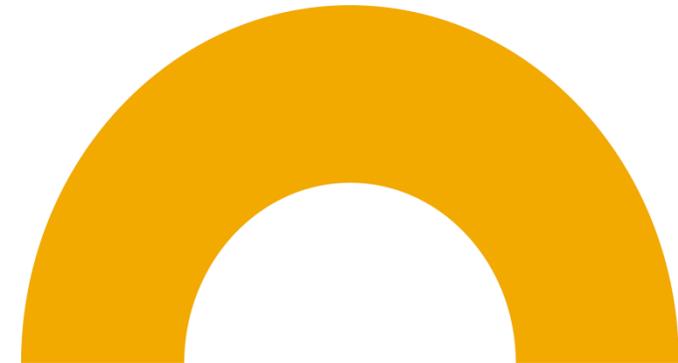
Non-verbal communication

Complex to measure

Non-verbal behaviour could affect scores
(Jenkins & Parra, 2003)
- kinesic (e.g. eye contact, smiling)
- paralinguistic (e.g. pitch range, rhythm)
- non-verbal turn taking (e.g. nodding, silences between turns)

Non-verbal communication – not a coping strategy for language deficiencies, but an integral aspect of successful interaction
(Kendon, 1990; Roever & Kasper, 2018)
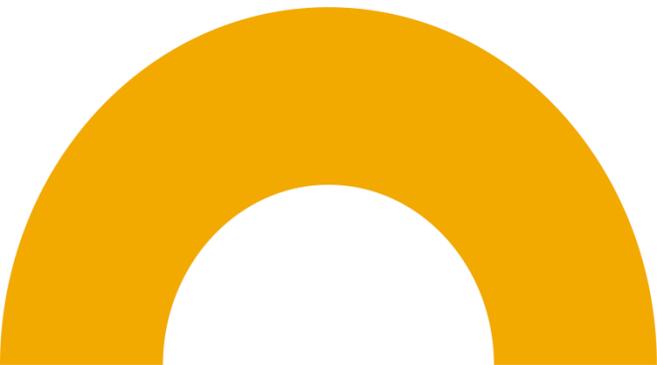
The testing of interactional competence …

A validity asset?

A validity threat?

How can interactional competence be measured without compromising test validity?

Construct definition

Test design

Assessment criteria

Examiner training in test delivery and scoring
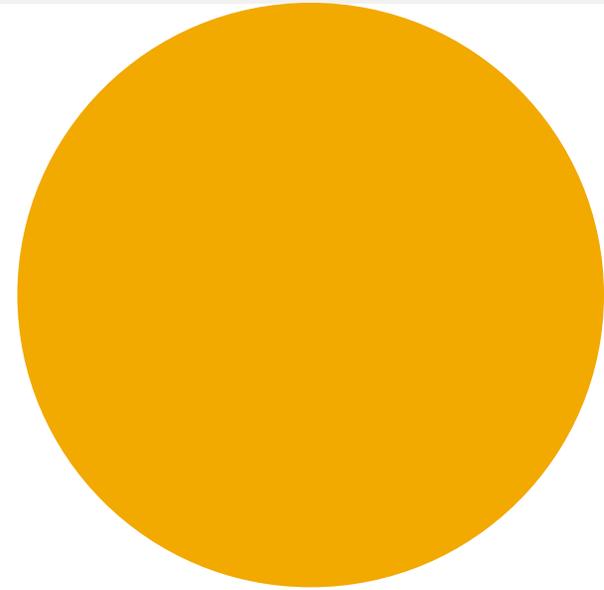
Two examples
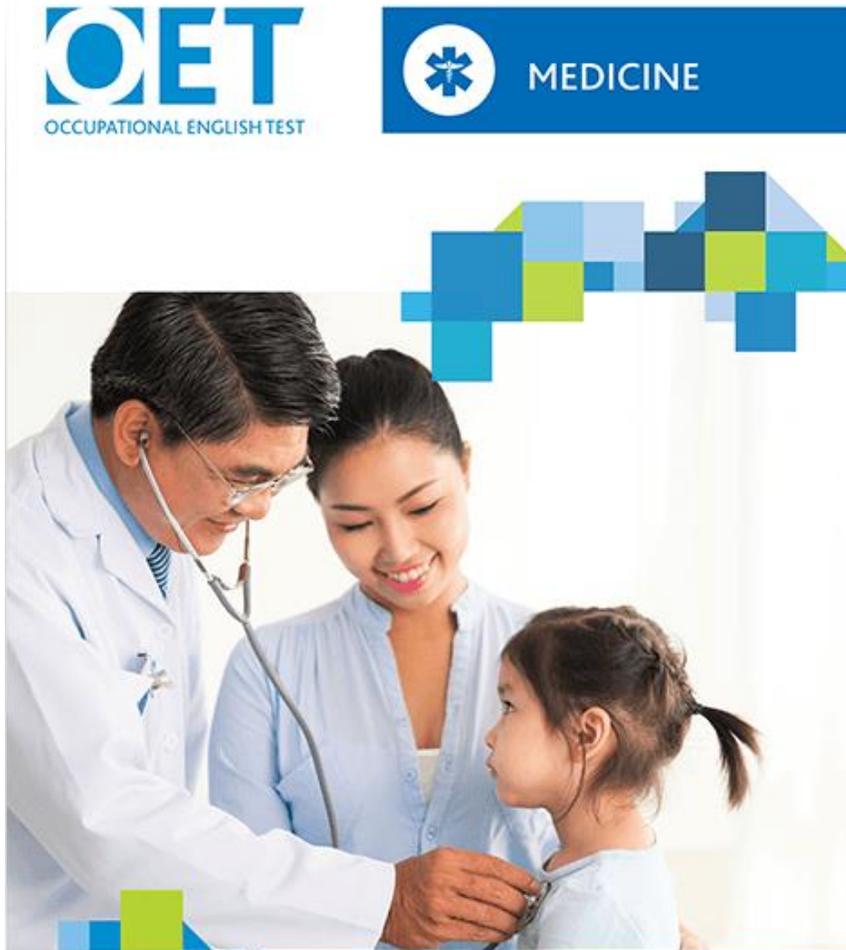
Case study 1: B2 First Speaking test

- Paired format

- 2 test-takers/2 examiners

- 4 task types: interview, long turn, collaborative task, discussion

- Examiner script + independent rating in real time

B2 First
Paired discussion task (Part 3)
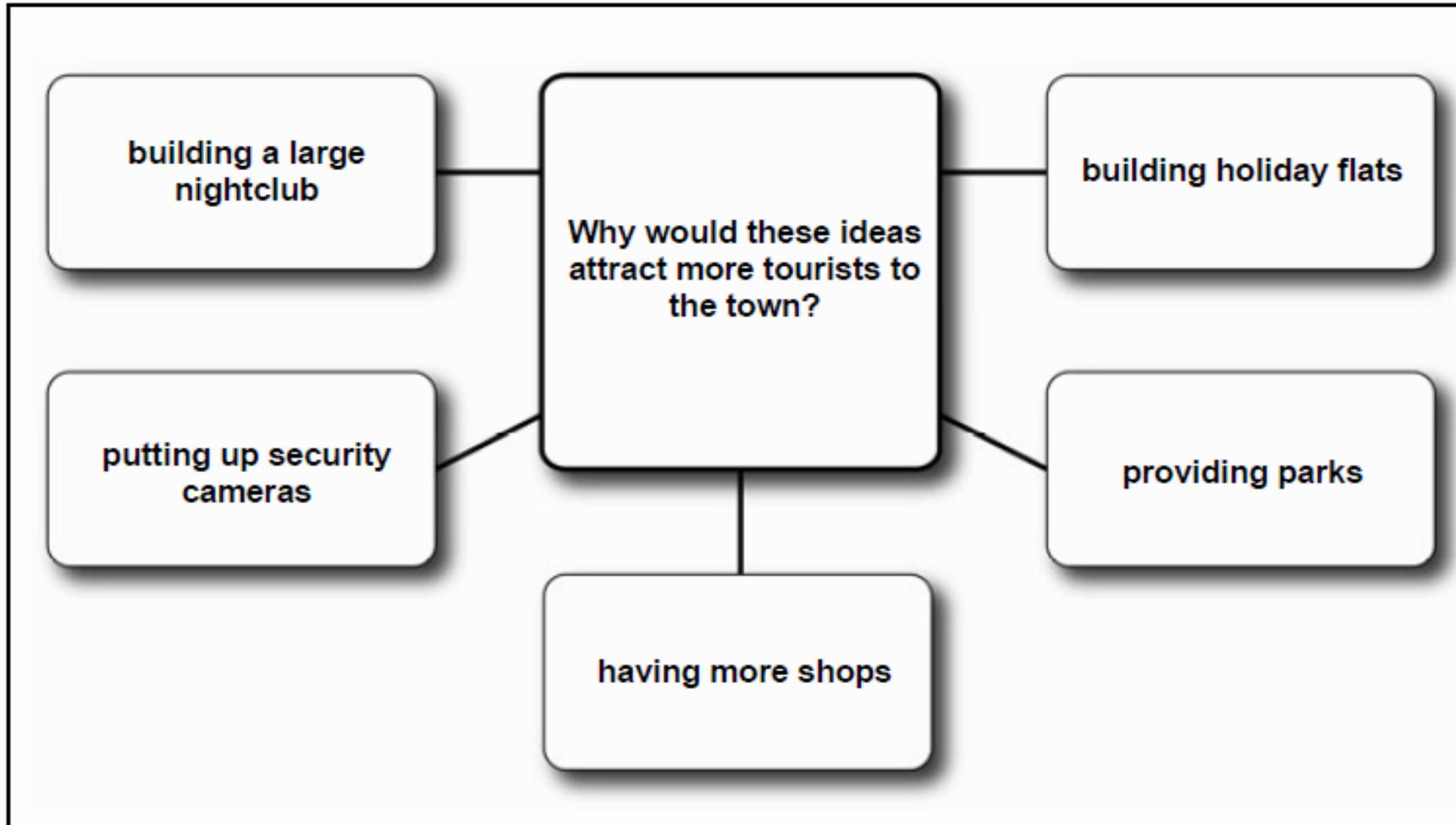
B2 First Speaking test
Test design

- Explicit contextual information

  - setting, participants, content

- Range of speech functions

  - e.g. providing personal information, describing, expressing and justifying opinions, comparing, agreeing/disagreeing, managing interaction

  - 4 task types

- Assessment criteria

Case study 2: Occupational English Test (OET)

- 1-to-1 face-to-face

- 2 role-plays (i.e. simulated professional consultations)

- Examiner script (NB no scoring)

ROLEPLAYER CARD NO. 1   VETERINARY SCIENCE

SETTING   Suburban Clinic

CLIENT   You have a five-year-old not neutered male dog. You think your dog has an ear infection because you noticed the dog scratching his ears and shaking his head. You also noticed an offensive smell coming from the ear area when you bathed him. You haven't neutered your dog because you think he will grow fat and lazy.

TASK
- Describe your dog's condition to the vet.

- Explain that you moistened a cotton ball with warm water to clean the ears and noticed dark brown 'crumbs' falling out of the ear.

- You are shocked to learn your dog has ear mites and listen to the vet explain treatment and control.

- Explain your fears of having the dog neutered but eventually agree to consider de-sexing your dog.

     SAMPLE TEST

CANDIDATE CARD NO. 1   VETERINARY SCIENCE

SETTING   Suburban Clinic

VET   Your client has a five-year-old entire male dog and thinks the dog has an ear infection. The dog scratches his ears and shakes his head. There is an offensive smell coming from the ear area.

TASK
- Ask the client to explain the dog's actions.
- Find out if cleaning the ear has been attempted or if anything was put in the ear.
- Explain that the dog has Ear Mites and they cause intense irritation. If untreated can predispose to infection which may rupture the ear drum.
- Tell the client about medication - drops into each ear twice daily or a specific topical flea treatment that is put onto the skin (more expensive). Good flea treatment is necessary to keep ear mites under control.
- Ask why the dog has not been de-sexed and suggest it is done.
- Explain with the correct diet and daily exercise his/her dog will stay healthy.

     SAMPLE TEST

OET role play tasks

Test design

- Explicit contextual information

  - setting, participants, content

- Range of speech functions

  - e.g. discussing symptoms and concerns, explaining cause of symptoms, recommending and exploring different treatment options …

- Implicit requirement for candidate to demonstrate empathy (Silverman, 2016)

  - attentive listening, facilitating patient's narrative, reassuring a patient who is worried/anxious/angry/concerned

Assessment criteria

"Indigenous" assessment criteria

(Jacoby,1998; Pill, 2016)

Linguistic criteria

- Intelligibility
- Fluency
- Appropriateness of language
- Resources of grammar and expression

Clinical communication criteria

- Relationship building
- Understanding and incorporating the patient's perspective
- Providing structure
- Information gathering
- Information giving

How is the construct of interactional competence conceptualised and operationalised in the B2 First and OET Speaking tests?
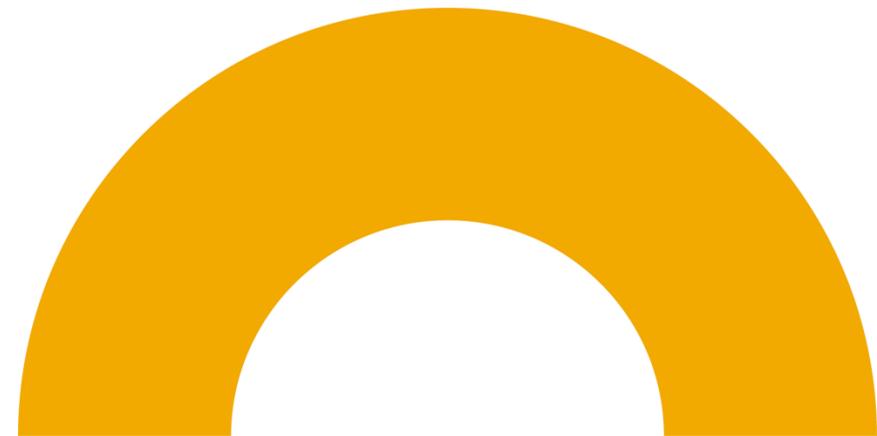
Balancing the tension between authenticity & reliability

- rich construct definition for IC

- context setting

- turn-taking management

- topic development

- interactive listening

- OET: discipline/workplace-specific

- OET: role specification

- OET: indigenous criteria – both linguistic AND clinical communication skills

- guided interaction but spontaneous (unscripted) talk

- examiner training

- independent double marking
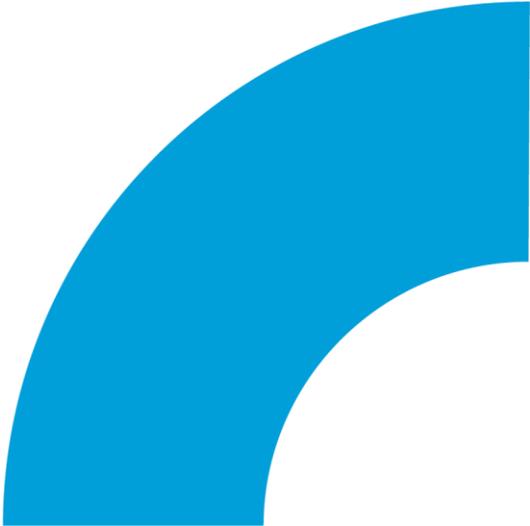
Taking account of the effect of interlocutor variables

The interlocutor as part of the IC construct ➔ reconceptualising <u>variability as construct-relevant</u>, not irrelevant

Guidance for interlocutors to minimise negative impact of any potential effect

OET: 2 role-play tasks ("2 bites of the cherry")

B2 First: 4 different task types (minimise caveats, optimise construct coverage)

Acknowledging the role of non-verbal behaviours

OET: non-verbal and paralinguistic behaviours included as part of the IC construct (i.e. broadening of the construct)

- Clinical communication criteria:
  - "Showing empathy for feelings/predicament/emotional state – achieved through both non-verbal and verbal behaviours … use of silence and appropriate voice tone …"
  - "Picking up the patient's cues – changes in non-verbal behaviour such as hesitation or change in volume …"
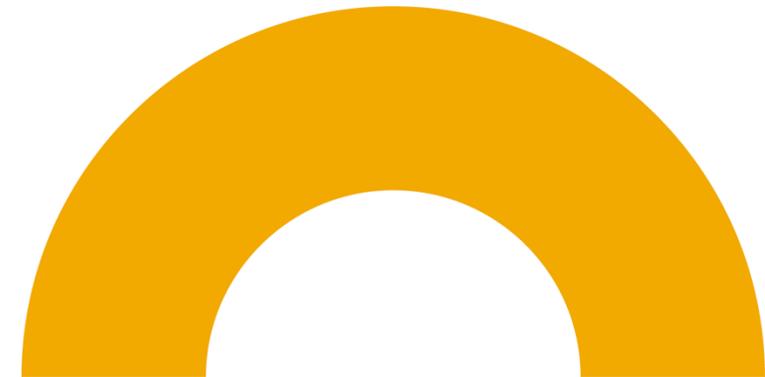
Food for thought … and further research?

- task comparability across tests/discipline areas?
- "role-play" vs "real-life"?
- socio-cultural conventions?
- personal characteristics?
- emotionally charged interaction?
- non-verbal interactive behaviour among L2 users not well understood?
- interlocutor training?
- assessor training?
- challenge for assessors, esp. when rating audio-recordings (kinesic and nonverbal turn-taking features are not visible)?

Further information

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Thank you.

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https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/first/

https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/