

P. Seedhouse & F. Nakatsuhara. *The Discourse of the IELTS Speaking Test: Interactional design and practice*. Cambridge University Press. 2018. Pp. 274.

The Discourse of the IELTS Speaking Test: Interactional design and practice, first published in 2018 by Cambridge Assessment English, written by Paul Seedhouse and Fumiyo Nakatsuhara, is the 7th series of English Profile Studies. This book focuses on how the IELTS Speaking test (IST), an interview test, is organized in terms of interactional features. It also investigates the discourse features that are elicited from the IELTS speaking test, shedding light on the relationship between rating procedures and discourse organization. The IST is designed to measure language learners' English proficiency exhibited in an academic context. The 11 to 14-minute speaking test consists of three parts: Part 1 (Introduction), Part 2 (Individual Long Turn), and Part 3 (Two-way Discussion). According to the Band Descriptors, the underlying constructs measured through IST include Fluency and Coherence, Lexical Resource, Grammatical Range, and Accuracy and Pronunciation (IELTS Handbook, 2005). The IST is intended to measure English oral proficiency and interactional effectiveness to some degree in the institutional context.

This volume consists of seven chapters. The opening chapter describes the IELTS Speaking Test (IST) and discusses its relationship to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The authors introduce the structure of the IST as well as its format and rating scales. Speech functions that frequently occur in test takers' responses (e.g., expressing a preference, conversation repair, justifying opinions) (UCLES, 2015) are also presented in this chapter. In relation to the IST and CEFR, the authors introduce the English Profile (EP) as a research series that aims at transposing the CEFR and enriching English language research. This volume, which is an addition to the EP series, uncovers the interactional organization of the IST, as demonstrated by various levels of participant performance, and sheds light on the interrelationship between interactional features and score bands. That said, this book offers insights into test takers' oral performance of different levels, which provides validity evidence for the CEFR and IELTS in terms of discourse organization. In the end, this chapter outlines the overarching goal of the volume to shed light on the interactional design of the IELTS speaking test.

Chapter 2 offers the readers a holistic review of how the IST is designed, its historical development, and its associated research projects (e.g., Brown's (2006) rating scale validation study). It introduces the English Language Testing Service (ELTS) speaking test (1980-1989), its original speaking component, and the changes that have been made based on the discourse features test designers intended to elicit. This chapter describes

how the ELTS evolved over time, and the main interactional features represented in the ELTS. The authors then explain how the IELTS test was introduced in 1989 based on empirical research, stakeholder views, and iterative discussions and consideration by the experts. The authors also introduce spoken language assessment research (e.g., Brown, 2007; Brown & Hill, 2007; Merrylees & McDowell, 2007; O'Loughlin, 2007) that informed the IST test revision, especially studies that describe discourse and conversation analytic approaches. Overall, this chapter documents the changes that occurred in the IELTS speaking test and the research projects that supported the changes, such as studies that employ Conversation Analysis (CA) to uncover interactional features (e.g., Brown & Hill, 2007). It is a great historical introduction to how the test was designed and has evolved based on theoretical frameworks and research evidence.

Chapter 3 discusses the lack of focus on communicativeness or interaction during the evolution of the IELTS speaking test and elaborates on CA as a method. It starts out by introducing basic interactional organizations (i.e., adjacency pairs, turn-taking, and repair), as well as socially distributed cognition, information exchange, and topic. It also introduces the dominant theoretical framework - CA, along with how Complexity Theory is utilized to complement CA. Complexity Theory, when applied to language, views interaction and learning as dynamic and nonlinear adaptive systems (cf. Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). The interaction between the examiner and examinee is dynamic and contingent and is thus not entirely predictable. This perspective echoes Heritage's (1984) point that interaction is both context shaped and context dependent and provides the basis for the argument that Complexity Theory and CA are compatible. While explaining the validity framework underlying the IST, the authors discuss balancing authenticity and fairness. For example, Brown (2007) argues that balancing fairness and the construct representation of interaction resulted in jeopardizing the interactions in the IELTS speaking test. There is a strong possibility that if an interactional speaking test uses more constrained criteria and tasks, it would lose communicative components to some degree. Unlike the traditional view that CA only looks at micro-analytic data, in contrast to a broadscale interactional organization, this chapter focuses on the holistic structure of interactional architecture. Last, Chapter 3 explicates the research concepts that are involved in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, such as language and the emic perspective (cf. Youn & Burch, 2020), reliability, validity, quantification, identity, institutional CA, applied CA, complexity theory, data, and sampling.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 elaborate on the organization of the IST in terms of topic development and adjacency pair in relation to institutional aims, primarily to elicit speech samples that are sufficient enough for raters to be able to "assess the candidate's proficiency level in English by matching features of candidate talk to the features

specified in the IELTS Band Descriptors” (p. 81). Chapter 4 gives an overview of the architecture of the interactional mechanism in the IST and how it was influenced by CA at IST’s revision in 2001. Situated within the IST context, Chapter 4 compares IST’s interactional mechanisms to an ordinary conversation in regard to repair, turn-taking and sequence, information exchange, and socially distributed cognition. One key argument of the volume is that the institutional goal is not to achieve *intersubjectivity* (cf. Burch & Kley, 2020), but to elicit and seek ratable speech samples, and utilize assessment data to measure candidates’ proficiency levels.

Chapter 5 addresses the topic of examiner and test taker discourse in the IST. It first elucidates the institutional goal in relation to the IST and then discusses how a topic is linked to interactional mechanisms. Since the IST offers limited opportunities for test takers to shift topics, in contrast to some CA literature that defines topic as “complex, fluid, subtle, shifting and elusive” (p. 116), the topic in the IST is more constrained, “pre-determined, scripted, fixed and equated with content” (p. 116). The authors then propose topic-as-script and topic-as-action to indicate two types of topic development. Topics in topic-as-script are pre-specified and are given to test takers or learners, whereas, topic-as-action refers to the ways in which test takers develop different topics (Seedhouse & Supakorn, 2014). Chapter 5 analyzes how test takers succeed or fail to turn topic-as-script to topic-as-action in different sections of the IST test, providing abundant examples. Aside from this analysis, Chapter 5 also analyzes the characteristics of examiners in terms of their topic management (e.g., topic shift, follow-up questions). Through a CA treatment of the assessment data in Chapter 5, the authors argue that topic is an essential component of the IST interactional mechanisms and recommend that researchers re-examine the role of topic in eliciting interactional competence between test takers.

Chapter 6 reports an empirical study conducted in 2014 by Seedhouse et al. (2014). A key aspect of the study is to find the distinguishing features that are represented at various proficiency levels in the IST. After elaborating the interactional mechanisms of the IST in the previous chapters, the authors seek to provide validity evidence of the IST. The researchers employ a mixed-method approach to scoring and its relationship to different band descriptors. Linking interactional features with scoring is important in language testing since it is directly related to how raters assign scores to test takers. Also, it is helpful for IST developers to better understand what features are distinguishable among students of various proficiency levels. Therefore, the authors answer two research questions in Chapter 6: whether scoring criteria are distinguishable enough across bands and what interactional features are salient across levels. The authors use Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to examine whether the speaking features are statistically different from each other across band

descriptors. In addition, the authors employ CA to show how speaking features, both inter-turn and intra-turn (e.g., requests, repetitions, hesitation markers) can distinguish high- and low-proficiency test takers.

Chapter 7 summarizes existing empirical findings on how interactional organizations are represented in the IST. It also lays out how interactional mechanisms are organized in the IST and how the interaction in the IST is demonstrated in the L2 classroom at a university (e.g., goal-oriented institutional interaction). The authors also recommend future research directions to researchers and suggestions (e.g., making sure the interactional organizations of an interview test are explicitly stated) for test developers to design an interactive speaking test.

This volume is groundbreaking because it is one of the few books that examines discourse features in language testing using a conversation analytic approach. The CA presented in the volume is comprehensible enough for a wide audience. However, one minor criticism that occurs to the reviewer is that Chapter 5 focuses excessively on examiners' behaviors on topic development with a relatively limited explanation from the examinee's perspective. Although examiner behavior is a crucial component in ensuring the fairness of a test, it would be interesting to add more perspectives on test takers' behaviors since spoken interaction is the result of any participants involved, and this co-construction is a key point when CA and assessment interact since CA features inform the IST test validation and revision.

Overall, the book is exceptionally well structured and useful for language test developers who would like to develop an interactional speaking test. The current discussion uses CA as a research method to provide validity evidence to speaking tasks of interaction competence. This volume explicitly explains each research concept used in this book and provides the audience with an abundance of examples. Besides, three papers were selected to discuss interaction in IELTS regarding interactional practice, topic, and the relationship between interaction and score. Additionally, it is a practical book for researchers to have a good command of how interactional features are presented in high-stake test design from a bottom-up CA perspective in spoken interaction. Moreover, the volume informs language test designers on how to develop their own rating scales because the authors provide a list of the most salient interactional features (e.g., repetitions) that could be incorporated into grading criteria. Another significant contribution for language testers is that this book offers new perspectives in terms of the development of the IST and the research projects that have driven the development of the test. Beyond researchers and practitioners in language testing, the volume helps test preparation instructors to understand the test better. Lastly, this volume is also a great

resource to learn about CA, its rationale, and its transcription protocols. CA contributes to the IST by providing validity evidence, and at the same time, helping researchers understand how test interactions are organized. This volume has also suggested best practices to examiners administering the IST. The test examiners need to mind the way in which they deliver the IST and interact with the test takers. In summary, this volume is an excellent guide for language test developers, test preparation instructors, English language teachers, test examiners, and English language researchers.

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