

## 6. The interactional organisation of the IELTS Speaking Test

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This report describes the interactional organisation of the IELTS Speaking Test in terms of turn-taking, sequence and repair.

### ABSTRACT

This study is based on the analysis of transcripts of 137 audio-recorded tests using a Conversation Analysis (CA) methodology. The institutional aim of standardisation in relation to assessment is shown to be the key principle underlying the organisation of the interaction. Overall, the vast majority of examiners conform to the instructions; in cases where they do not do so, they often give an advantage to some candidates. The overall organisation of the interaction is highly constrained, although there are some differences in the different parts of the test. The organisation of repair has a number of distinctive characteristics in that it is conducted according to strictly specified rules, in which the examiners have been briefed and trained.

Speaking test interaction is an institutional variety of interaction with three sub-varieties. It is very different to ordinary conversation, has some similarities with some sub-varieties of L2 classroom interaction and some similarities with interaction in universities.

A number of recommendations are made in relation to examiner training, instructions and test design.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a qualitative study of the IELTS Speaking Test, which is the most widely used English proficiency test for overseas applicants to British universities. The Speaking Test is designed to assess how effectively candidates can communicate in English. About 4,000 certified examiners administer well over 500,000 IELTS tests annually at over 300 centres in around 120 countries around the world.

Based on a selection of 137 transcribed oral proficiency interviews, this study analyses the internal organisation of this institutional variety of interaction in terms of examiner-candidate talk. In particular, the interactional structures are investigated in the areas of trouble and repair, turn-taking and sequence, and topic development. The analysis also focuses on how examiners put instructions from the training documents into practice, and how institutional constraints may implicate learners' speech behaviour. Since the Speaking Test is taken to predict how well candidates will communicate in a university setting, it is important to understand what kind of interaction is generated in the test and its relationship to interaction in the target setting.

In the next section of this report (Part 2), a background description of the Speaking Test is provided, together with a presentation of the research design. The ensuing presentation of the analytic results focuses on brief answers to the research questions (Part 3). A more detailed qualitative data analysis with displays of exemplary transcript excerpts follows in Part 4. The conclusion (Part 5) raises applied issues for test design and examiner training, and develops implications for future research.

## 2 RESEARCH DESIGN

### 2.1 Background information on the IELTS Speaking Test

IELTS Speaking Tests are encounters between one candidate and one examiner and are designed to take between 11 and 14 minutes. There are three main parts. Each part fulfils a specific function in terms of interaction pattern, task input and candidate output. These are now described as a backdrop for the analysis.

In Part 1 (Introduction) candidates answer general questions about themselves, their homes/families, their jobs/studies, their interests, and a range of familiar topic areas. Examiners introduce themselves and confirm candidate's identity. Examiners interview candidates using verbal questions selected from familiar topic frames. This part lasts between four and five minutes. In Part 2 (Individual long turn) the candidate is given a verbal prompt on a card and is asked to talk on a particular topic. The candidate has one minute to prepare before speaking at length, for between one and two minutes. The examiner then asks one or two rounding-off questions. In Part 3 (Two-way discussion) the examiner and candidate engage in a discussion of more abstract issues and concepts which are thematically linked to the topic prompt in Part 2.

Examiners receive detailed directives in order to maximise test reliability and validity. The most relevant and important instructions to examiners are as follows: "Standardisation plays a crucial role in the successful management of the IELTS Speaking Test." (Instructions to IELTS Examiners, pp11). "The IELTS Speaking Test involves the use of an examiner frame which is **a script that must be followed** (original emphasis)...Stick to the rubrics – do not deviate in any way...If asked to repeat rubrics, do not rephrase in any way...Do not make any unsolicited comments or offer comments on performance." (IELTS Examiner Training Material 2001, pp5). The degree of control over the phrasing differs in the three parts of the test as follows: "The wording of the frame is carefully controlled in Parts 1 and 2 of the Speaking Test to ensure that all candidates receive similar input delivered in the same manner. In Part 3, the frame is less controlled so that the examiner's

language can be accommodated to the level of the candidate being examined. In all parts of the test, examiners are asked to follow the frame in delivering the script...Examiners should refrain from making unscripted comments or asides.” (Instructions to IELTS Examiners, pp5). Research has shown that the speech functions which occur regularly in a candidate’s output during the Speaking Test are: providing personal information; expressing a preference; providing non-personal information; comparing; expressing opinions; summarising; explaining; conversation repair; suggesting; contrasting; justifying opinions; narrating and paraphrasing; speculating; analysing. Other speech functions may emerge during the test, but they are not forced by the test structure (Taylor, 2001a).

Detailed performance descriptors have been developed which describe spoken performance at the nine IELTS bands, based on the following criteria. Scores are reported as whole bands only.

*Fluency and coherence* refers to the ability to talk with normal levels of continuity, rate and effort and to link ideas and language together to form coherent, connected speech. The key indicators of fluency are speech rate and speech continuity. The key indicators of coherence are logical sequencing of sentences, clear marking of stages in a discussion, narration or argument, and the use of cohesive devices (eg connectors, pronouns and conjunctions) within and between sentences.

*Lexical resource* refers to the range of vocabulary the candidate can use and the precision with which meanings and attitudes can be expressed. The key indicators are the variety of words used, the adequacy and appropriacy of the words used and the ability to circumlocute (get round a vocabulary gap by using other words) with or without noticeable hesitation.

*Grammatical range and accuracy* refers to the range and the accurate and appropriate use of the candidate’s grammatical resource. The key indicators of grammatical range are the length and complexity of the spoken sentences, the appropriate use of subordinate clauses, and variety of sentence structures, and the ability to move elements around for information focus. The key indicators of grammatical accuracy are the number of grammatical errors in a given amount of speech and the communicative effect of error.

*Pronunciation* refers to the capacity to produce comprehensible speech in fulfilling the Speaking Test requirements. The key indicators will be the amount of strain caused to the listener, the amount of unintelligible speech and the noticeability of L1 influence. (IELTS Handbook 2005, pp11)

## 2.2 The study

The overall aim is to uncover the interactional organisation of the IELTS Speaking Test as it is collaboratively produced in its three parts. In this section, we present the research questions, methodology, data, sampling and the relation to existing literature.

Sub-questions are as follows:

1. How and why does interactional trouble arise and how is it repaired by the interactants? What types of repair initiation are used by examiners and examinees and how are these responded to? What role does repetition play?
2. What is the organisation of turn-taking and sequence?
3. What is the relationship between Speaking Test interaction and other speech exchange systems such as ordinary conversation, L2 classroom interaction, and interaction in universities?
4. What is the relationship between examiner interaction and candidate performance?
5. To what extent do examiners follow the briefs they have been given?

6. In cases where examiners diverge from briefs, what impact does this have on the interaction?
7. How are tasks implemented? What is the relationship between the intended tasks and the implemented tasks, between the task-as-workplan and task-in-process?
8. How is the organisation of the interaction related to the institutional goal and participants' orientations?
9. How are the roles of examiner and examinee, the participation framework and the focus of the interaction established?
10. How long do tests last in practice and how much time is given for preparation in Part 2?

Language proficiency interviews in general are intended to assess the language proficiency of non-native speakers and to predict their ability to communicate in future encounters. IELTS “is designed to assess the language ability of candidates who need to study or work where English is used as the language of communication” ([www.ielts.org.handbook.htm](http://www.ielts.org.handbook.htm)). The Speaking Test aims to evaluate how well a language learner might function in a target context, often an academic one. The IELTS Speaking Test is predominantly used to assess and predict whether a candidate has the ability to communicate effectively on programmes in English-speaking universities. Hypothetically, interaction in oral proficiency interviews could be characterised in a number of ways, including similarities and differences with other speech exchange systems such as ordinary conversation, L2 classroom interaction, task-based interaction, academic interaction, interviews and tests.

This project aims to determine the endogenous organisation of the Speaking Test and its relationship to some of these other systems. Because the Speaking Test (with its own interactional organisation) evaluates learners' ability to function in future in other speech exchange systems, each with their own interactional organisation, the proposed research should be of interest to the following parties: fellow researchers in language testing; designers of the IELTS Speaking Test and other similar tests; IELTS examiners; teachers preparing students for the Speaking Test. It is argued that making the interactional organisation of the Speaking Test explicit may help to ensure comparability of challenge to candidates from different cultural backgrounds.

The question of how and why interactional trouble arises and how it is repaired by the interactants should be of interest to all those taking part and designers of test items would be interested in how the items are actually implemented in practice. Seedhouse (2004) suggests that the organisation of repair in L2 classrooms is reflexively related to the pedagogical focus. This study will investigate when repair occurs, how it is organised in the Speaking Test and what the relationship is between the organisation of repair and the institutional goal. The research, then, intends to provide empirical insights and raise awareness which can then feed into all areas of test development and training.

### 2.3 Methodology

The methodology employed is Conversation Analysis (CA) (Drew & Heritage, 1992a; Lazaraton, 2002; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Seedhouse, 2004). Studies of institutional interaction have focussed on how the organisation of the interaction is related to the institutional aim and on the ways in which this organisation differs from the benchmark of free conversation. Heritage (1997) proposes six basic places to probe the institutionality of interaction, namely:

- turn-taking organisation
- overall structural organisation of the interaction
- sequence organisation
- turn design
- lexical choice
- epistemological and other forms of asymmetry.

He also proposes four different kinds of asymmetry in institutional talk:

- asymmetries of participation, eg the professional asking questions to the lay client
- asymmetries of interactional and institutional know-how, eg professionals being used to type of interaction, agenda and typical course of an interview in contrast to the lay client
- epistemological caution and asymmetries of knowledge, eg professionals often avoiding taking a firm position
- rights of access to knowledge, particularly professional knowledge.

Interactional asymmetry and roles in LPs are controversial issues (Taylor, 2001c) and Speaking Test data are examined with the above issues in mind. Perhaps the most important analytical consideration is that institutional talk displays goal orientation and rational organisation. In contrast to conversation, participants in institutional interaction orient to some “core goal, task or identity (or set of them) conventionally associated with the institution in question.” (Drew & Heritage, 1992b, pp22). CA institutional discourse methodology attempts to relate not only the overall organisation of the interaction but also individual interactional devices to the core institutional goal. CA attempts, then, to understand the organisation of the interaction as being *rationally* derived from the core institutional goal. Levinson sees the structural elements of institutional talk as:

*Rationally and functionally adapted to the point or goal of the activity in question, that is the function or functions that members of the society see the activity as having. By taking this perspective it seems that in most cases apparently ad hoc and elaborate arrangements and constraints of very various sorts can be seen to follow from a few basic principles, in particular rational organisation around a dominant goal. (Levinson, 1992, pp 71)*

Seedhouse (2004) describes the overall interactional organisation of the L2 classroom, identifying the institutional goal as well as the interactional properties which derive directly from the goal. He also identifies the basic sequence organisation of L2 classroom interaction and exemplifies how the institution of the L2 classroom is talked in and out of being by participants. Seedhouse demonstrates that, although L2 classroom interaction is extremely diverse, heterogeneous, fluid and complex, it is nonetheless possible to describe its interactional architecture. In the case of Speaking Test interaction, we will see that there is considerably less diversity and heterogeneity than in L2 classrooms because of the restrictions of the test format and the use of similar tasks for all participants. Language proficiency interviews (LPs) differ from other types of institutional interaction in one respect. Normally, the institutional business is achieved via the content of the talk, whereas in the LP the content of the talk is not central. The responses are required to be accurate and relevant to the questions, but the examiner does not have to employ the responses to further the institutional business; language is used for display rather than communication. (The authors are grateful to G Thompson for this and other comments.)

In this study, we employ Richards and Seedhouse’s (2005) model of “description leading to informed action” in relation to applications of CA. We link the description of the interaction to the institutional goals and provide proposals for informed action based on our analysis of the data.

## 2.4 Data

The analysis of naturalistic data, one of the basic premises of CA research, allows a direct and authentic examination of the interactants’ conduct. Therefore, the primary raw data consist of audio recordings in cassette format of operational IELTS Speaking Tests. All IELTS Speaking Tests are routinely recorded for monitoring and quality assurance purposes; in addition, a selection of these is entered into an IELTS Speaking Test Corpus which is used for research purposes and currently contains several thousand test performances. The data set for this study was drawn from recordings of live tests conducted during 2003. Secondary data included paper materials relevant to the Speaking Tests recorded on cassette, including examiners’ briefs, marking criteria, examiner

induction, training, standardisation and certification packs (Taylor, 2001b). These data were helpful in establishing the institutional goal of the interaction and the institutional orientations of the examiners. The primary raw data (137 Speaking Tests) were transcribed using CA transcription conventions (Appendix 1) by postgraduate research students at the University of Newcastle, using the existing transcription equipment in the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences. The resultant transcripts were produced in paper and electronic format and are copyright of Cambridge ESOL, one of the IELTS partners. All personal references have been anonymised.

## 2.5 Sampling

The IELTS Speaking Test Corpus contains over 2,500 recordings of tests conducted during 2003; the researchers selected an initial sample of 300 cassettes and then transcribed 137 of these. The aim of the sampling was to ensure variety in the transcripts in terms of gender, region of the world, task/topic number and Speaking Test band score. The test centre countries covered by the transcribed tests are: Albania, Brazil, Cameroon, United Kingdom, Greece, Indonesia, India, Iran, Jamaica, Lebanon, Mozambique, Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Oman, Pakistan, Syria, Vietnam and Zimbabwe. However, we do not have data on individual candidate nationality and ethnicity and it should be borne in mind that in, for example, the data from the UK, a wide range of nationalities and ethnic backgrounds are covered. We do not have any data on the first languages of candidates. Overall test scores covered by the transcribed sample range from band 9.0 to band 3.0 on the IELTS Speaking Module. Two tasks among the many used for the test were selected for transcription. This enabled easy location of audio cassettes whilst at the same time ensuring diversity of task.

The way in which sampling was conducted is as follows: Cambridge ESOL has written information on the above variables in relation to their corpus of IELTS Speaking Tests. The researchers first examined the information available in consultation with Cambridge ESOL and then requested a set of 300 cassettes which covered the range of variables, namely gender, region of the world, task/topic number and Speaking Test band score. A certain number of these cassettes were not usable due to poor sound quality or inadequate labelling. From the researchers' perspective, the aim was to produce a description of the interactional architecture of the Speaking Test which was able to account for all of the data, regardless of variables relating to particular candidates. The description will tend to have more credibility if the data sampled cover a wide range of variables.

## 2.6 Relationship to existing research literature

The research builds on existing research in two areas. Firstly, it builds on existing research done specifically on the IELTS Speaking Test and on language proficiency interviews in general. Secondly, it builds on existing CA research into language proficiency interviews in particular, into institutional talk (Drew & Heritage, 1992a) and into applications of CA (Richards & Seedhouse, 2005).

Taylor (2000) identifies the nature of the candidate's spoken discourse and the language and behaviour of the oral examiner as issues of current research interest. Wigglesworth (2001:206) suggests that "In oral assessments, close attention needs to be paid, not only to possible variables which can be incorporated or not into the task, but also to the role of the interlocutor... in ensuring that learners obtain similar input across similar tasks." Brown & Hill (1998) examine the relationship between the interactional style of the interviewer and candidate performance, with easier interviewers shifting topics frequently and asking simpler questions, while more difficult interviewers used interruption, disagreement and challenging questions. This study builds on this work by examining through a sizeable dataset the relationship between the interactional style of the interviewer and candidate performance.

Previous CA-informed work in the area of oral proficiency interviews area by Young and He (1998) and Lazaraton (1997) examined the American Language Proficiency Interview (LPI). Egbert points out that "LPis are implemented in imitation of natural conversation in order to evaluate a learner's



conversational proficiency” (Egbert, 1998:147). Young and He’s collection demonstrates, however, a number of clear differences between LPIs and ordinary conversation. Firstly, the systems of turn-taking and repair differ from ordinary conversation. Secondly, LPIs are examples of goal-oriented institutional discourse, in contrast to ordinary conversation. Thirdly, LPIs constitute cross-cultural communication in which the participants may have very different understandings of the nature and purpose of the interaction. Egbert’s (1998) study demonstrates that interviewers explain to students not only the organisation of repair they should use, but also the forms they should use to do so; the suggested forms are cumbersome and differ from those found in ordinary conversation. He’s (1998) microanalysis reveals how a student’s failure in an LPI is due to interactional as well as linguistic problems. Kasper and Ross (2001:10) point out that their CA analysis of LPIs portrays candidates as “eminently skilful interlocutors”, which contrasts with the general SLA view that clarification and confirmation checks are indices of NNS incompetence, while their (2003) paper analyses how repetition can be a source of miscommunication in LPIs.

In the context of course placement interviews, Lazaraton (1997) notes that students initiated a particular sequence, namely self-deprecations of their English language ability. She further suggests that a student providing a demonstration of poor English language ability constitutes grounds for acceptance onto courses. Interactional sequences are therefore linked to participant orientations and goals. Lazaraton (2002) presents a CA approach to the validation of LPIs and her framework should enable findings from this research to feed into future decision-making in relation to the Speaking Test.

### 3 DATA ANALYSIS

We now move on from the summary answers to examine in more detail a number of themes which emerged from our more detailed qualitative analysis of the data. In particular, we show the interview-specific structures of (1) trouble and repair, including repair initiation and repetition as the repair operation, (2) turn-taking and sequence, with a special focus on the (lack of) transitions between test parts and question sequences, and (3) topic development, with disjunction being related to abrupt sequencing. Other issues arising in the data are addressed in terms of vocabulary, evaluation, answering the question, and introducing the interview (4). Two themes which arise frequently are interactional problems caused by examiners deviating from instructions and problems issuing from the design of the test itself. In this part of the report, excerpts from transcripts serve to exemplify the findings. Please note that two complete transcripts are available in Appendices 2 and 3 for further review.

#### 3.1 Trouble and repair

Repair is the mechanism by which interactants address and resolve trouble in speaking, hearing and understanding (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977). Trouble is anything which the participants display as impeding speech production or intersubjectivity; a repairable item is one which constitutes such trouble for the participants. Any element of talk may in principle be the focus of repair, even an element which is well-formed, propositionally correct and appropriate. Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks (1977:363) point out that “nothing is, in principle, excludable from the class ‘repairable’”. Repair, trouble and repairable items are participants’ constructs, for use how and when participants find appropriate. Their use may be related to institutional constraints, however. In courtroom cross-examination of a witness by an opposing lawyer, for example, a failure by the witness to answer questions with *yes* or *no* may constitute trouble within that institutional setting (Drew, 1992). Such a failure is therefore repairable (for example by the lawyer and/or judge insisting on a yes/no answer) and even sanctionable. So within a particular institutional sub-variety, the constitution of trouble and what is repairable may be related to the particular institutional focus.

We now focus on the connection between repair and test design. By examining how and why interactional problems arise, it may be possible to fine-tune test design and procedures to minimise trouble. As mentioned above, there does appear to be some kind of correlation between test score and occurrence of trouble and repair: in interviews with high test scores, fewer examples of repair are observable.

To illustrate this observation, two complete transcripts are produced in the Appendices, one with a high score of band 9.0 (Appendix 3) and no occurrence of trouble in hearing or understanding, and one with a low score of band 3.0 (Appendix 2), which gives the impression of great strain in both the candidate's and the examiner's conduct. The candidate's performance is characterised by three instances of other-initiated repair in the first half of Part 1 of the interview. Although she does not initiate any further other-repair, her long delays in uptake in combination with answers which display partial, wrong or lack of understanding occur throughout the interview. While there are indications that high scoring and low occurrence of trouble co-occur, our study is furthermore interested in uncovering any instances of trouble which may have been created by the test format or procedures themselves and which may therefore have an impact on test validity and reliability.

### 3.1.1 Repair initiation

Repair policy and practice vary in the different parts of the test. Examiners have training and written instructions on how to respond to repair initiations by candidates. "When interaction has clearly broken down, or fails to develop initially, the examiner will need to intervene. This...may involve: repetition of all or part of the rubric (Part 1 or 2); the examiner asking: 'Can you tell me anything more about that?' (Part 2); re-wording a question/prompt or asking a different question (Part 3)" (IELTS Examiner Training Material 2001, pp 6).

Candidates initiate repair in relation to examiner questions in a variety of ways. Examiner instructions are to repeat the question once only but not to paraphrase or alter the question. In Part 1, "The exact words in the frame should be used. If a candidate misunderstands the question, it can be repeated once but the examiner cannot reformulate the question in his or her own words. If misunderstanding persists, the examiner should move on to another question in the frame. The examiner should not explain any vocabulary in the frame." (Instructions to IELTS Examiners, pp5). The vast majority of examiners in the data do conform to this guidance; however, they frequently do make prosodic adjustments, as in the example below. (For transcription conventions, the reader is referred to Appendix 1.)

#### *Extract 1*

70→ E: do people (0.6) <generally prefer watching films at home> (0.2)  
 71 C: yeah (0.5)  
 72 E: <or in a cinema> (0.2)  
 73 C: yeah (2.7) so (1.2)  
 74→ E: do people generally prefer watching films (.) at home (0.3)  
 75 C: mm hm (0.6)  
 76 E: or in a (0.3) cinema (0.2)  
 77 C: I think a cinema (0.4)  
 78 E: °why°? (0.6)  
 79 C: because I think cinema (0.9) is too big (0.2) and (1.2) you can (0.3) you  
 80 can join in the:: the film (0.7)

(Part 1)

In this case the examiner repeats the question once. Sometimes examiners do not follow the guidelines and modify the question, as in the extract below:

*Extract 2*

- 17 E: can we talk about your country (.) which part of China (0.2) do most  
 18 people live in (0.4)  
 19 C: uhm in I think in the south of China most people living (0.4)  
 20 E: yeah (0.3) tell me about the main industries in China (0.8)  
 21 C: sorry? (0.3)  
 22 E: the main industries (0.3)  
 23 C: industries?=  
 24 E: → =like ca:r industry:=  
 25 C: =o:h (0.4)  
 26 E: → factories where they make th[in]gs (0.3)  
 27 C: [oh]  
 28 E: → what what things does China (.) m[ake ]  
 29 C: [oh ye]s (0.4) uhm I think mm China:  
 30 (0.5) the heavy industry (0.2) is uh most uh °important° in (0.5) China  
 31 (0.3)  
 32 E: mm hm (1.2) how easy is it to travel ↑round China (0.9)  
 (Part 1)

In Part 3, by contrast, “The scripted frame is looser and the examiner uses language appropriate to the level of the candidate being examined. The examiner should use the topic content provided and formulate prompts to which the candidate responds in order to develop the dialogue.”

*Extract 3*

- 117 E: can you suggest some of the ways life has improved because of  
 118 technology?  
 119 C: → (0.4) can you repeat that?  
 120 E: are there some ways that our life has improved because of this technology  
 121 C: → mm (3.0)  
 122 E: have our lives become easier and more convenient because of new  
 123 technology  
 124 C: erm yes (0.3) I think technology helps us a lot  
 (Part 3)

Here the examiner reformulates the question in line 122 in response to a repair initiation in line 119 which is followed by a hesitation and 3 second pause in line 121; this is within the guidelines for Part 3 of the test. Another example of the examiner modifying questions in Part 3 was found in 0125, lines 290-295.

On rare occasions, candidates ask for help in explaining a question. Sometimes examiners follow the guidelines and repeat the question. Sometimes this leads to the interaction being able to proceed on track, as in the extract below.

*Extract 4*

- 73 E: and what do you think (0.7) erm (2.1) what do you think the role of  
 74 public transport will be in the future here in Albania? (2.6)  
 75→ C: what do you mean? (0.3)  
 76 E: what kind of role does it (1.0) will it have in the future? (1.1)  
 77 C: oh (.) what role? (1.2) well (2.0) the same as now I think (.) the (.) greater  
 78 part the people mostly erm (0.7) travel or (.) be with the public transport  
 79 E: (2.1)you don't think that will change? (2.8)  
 80 C: no (0.4)  
 (Part 3)

Note that in this case, the candidate's repair initiation at line 75 does not claim trouble in understanding the words of the utterance but rather the intended meaning of the prompt. While the examiner does not produce a verbatim repetition in response, she repeats only the key words from the original prompt. In the candidate's ensuing uptake (line 77) he displays that his trouble had been "what role", indicating that his trouble had not just been the meaning but rather the meaning was impeded by lack of word recognition.

Sometimes the examiner's repetition of the question does not result in the interaction being able to proceed, as shown in the data segment below. After a repair initiation (line 64) and the ensuing repetition (line 65) do not resolve the candidate's trouble in understanding, his ensuing request for reformulation (line 66-67) is declined implicitly, as per examiner instructions, and the sequence is aborted (line 68).

*Extract 5*

- 63 E: what qualifications or certificates do you hope to get? (0.4)  
 64→ C: sorry? (0.4)  
 65 E: what qualifications or (.) certificates (0.3) do you hope to get (2.2)  
 66 C: could you ask me in another way (.) I'm not quite sure (.) quite sure about  
 67 this (1.3)  
 68 E: it's alright (0.3) thank you (0.5) uh:: can we talk about your childhood?  
 69 (0.7)  
 (Part 1)

In the above extract we can see that there is no requirement for the examiner to achieve intersubjectivity or mutual understanding. The institutional aim is for the examiner to assess the candidate in terms of a specific band, and the candidate's inability to answer even after repetition provides the examiner with data for this task; the examiner simply moves on to the next prompt. We should note, however, that the lack of requirement to achieve intersubjectivity produced by the test design creates a major difference between Speaking Test interaction and interaction in university seminars, tutorials and workshops, in which the achievement of intersubjectivity is a major institutional goal.

Sometimes examiners oblige the candidate and explain the question, contrary to instructions. Note that in a similar way to the previous example, there are two succeeding repair sequences, each consisting of a repair initiation and operation. In both cases, the examiner first repeats the prompt. In this case, however, the second repair operation consists of examples. It is noteworthy that once intersubjectivity is re-established, the candidate heavily recycles words from the helpful repair operation. It thus seems that the examiner's deviation from the training manual provides an advantage to the candidate.

*Extract 6*

- 50 E: what kind of shops do you prefer?  
 51 C: (1.0) shop? (.) er (0.3) do you explain perhaps for me please?  
 52 E: erm (2.4) what kind of shops do you like?  
 53 C: kind of shop?  
 54 E: → big shop? small shop?  
 55 C: ah ah yeah I understand (0.2) I like er big shop (0.2) I prefer big shop  
 (Part 1)

Sometimes, candidates may ask for clarification of a question. According to the guidelines for Part 3, examiners may do so, as in the example below.

*Extract 7*

- 79 E: first of all (0.3) er if we could (.) look a little at public and private  
 80 transport (.) em could you evaluate for me (0.6) please (0.7) the  
 81 advantages of private and public transport?  
 82 C: when you mean private and public transport you mean like er (.) private  
 83 for example a family goes alone or you mean like like private owned?  
 84 E: no with a car or something like that (1.4)

(Part 3)

Examiners are briefed to not help candidates who are struggling “Examiners should not prompt candidates who are struggling to find language.” (Instructions to IELTS Examiners, pp6). However, there are exceptions to these instructions: in Part 2, “When interaction has clearly broken down, or fails to develop initially, the examiner will need to intervene. This...may involve: repetition of all or part of the rubric (Part 1 or 2); the examiner asking: ‘Can you tell me anything more about that?’ (Part 2)” (Examiner Training Material 2001, pp6). In an exceptional case (Extract 8) with a very weak student, we can see an example of the examiner trying to help the candidate in Part 2.

*Extract 8*

- 78 C: yes (0.8) er I travelled in er (.) in er (inyana) (eryana’s) very (.) very (like)  
 79 and er (.) I went (.) I went er to: (1.4) I went there for er the job (0.3) and  
 80 er (5.4) and er (0.8)  
 81 E: did you enjoy your trip or not (.) how did you go there? (.) you went to  
 82 (Indiana)  
 83 C: yes  
 84 E: → how did you travel there? (12.7) did you go by train did you go by plane?  
 85 C: er (0.3) I went er (1.0) to the bus and erm (.) I went erm to my parents and  
 86 erm (2.1)  
 87 E: did you enjoy the trip? (1.0) ((name omitted))  
 88 C: er yes I (1.8) I enjoy the er (7.1)

(Part 2)

Above we see the examiner rephrasing the question in line 84 and then simplifying the question by offering train and plane alternatives.

Examiners are instructed to not correct candidate utterances, and instances of correction are indeed very rare. In Extract 9, with a weak candidate, we see an example of correction.

*Extract 9*

- 1 E: can you tell me where you come from? (name omitted)  
 2 C: ahh I come from I I I come from Korea.  
 3 E: alright um where where in Korea?  
 4 C: er Korea is um  
 5 E: → no no not where is Korea where in Korea which city?  
 6 C: it’s Asia Asia  
 7 E: (1.0) I know that  
 8 C: → it’s Seoul Seoul

(Part 1)

In the above extract, the examiner initiates repair of the candidate’s answer in line 5 before s/he has completed it. Eventually in line 8 the candidate is able to self-repair successfully. In line 5, the examiner initiates repair on her own prior utterance in light of the fact that the candidate’s answer in line 4 displays a wrong understanding of what the examiner said in line 3. Note that the trouble source is “in”, which the candidate mistakes for “is”. In her third position repair, the examiner places

emphasis on “in”, yet this is not reflected in the candidate’s next response (line 6). After the examiner has rejected that answer (line 7), the candidate finally responds adequately to the prompt.

In this section we have seen that there are slight differences in the interpretation of examiner instructions relating to repair in the different parts of the test. The vast majority of examiners adhere rigidly to these instructions. Some examiners do not follow the rules, and in these cases they provide a clear advantage to their candidates.

### 3.1.2 Repetition of questions

The repetition of questions plays a key role in the Speaking Test and is therefore examined in detail. The instruction manual states for Part 1 of the interview that examiners are to repeat the question only one time (in case of trouble) and then to move on: “The exact words in the frame should be used. If a candidate misunderstands the question, it can be repeated once but the examiner cannot reformulate the question in his or her own words. If misunderstanding persists, the examiner should move on to another question in the frame.” (Instructions to IELTS Examiners, pp5). In the vast majority of cases, examiners adhere to this policy. Occasionally, however, some examiners do not follow these instructions, and we examine some instances of this below; the consequences of repeated repetition vary.

#### Extract 10

- 53 E: yes (0.3) was it a good place for children (1.1)  
 54 C: s- (0.3) beg your pardon ma’am (0.5)  
 55 E: → was it a good place (.) for children (0.3)  
 56 C: for children (1.2) eh well that’s definitely my whole ((°inaudible°)) (0.5)  
 57 E: → was it a good place (.) for children (0.7)  
 58 C: good place for children. (0.4) I’m sorry I’m not can you please be a bit  
 59 more specific I hope if you don’t mind so ma’am (0.6)  
 60 E: mm=  
 61 C: =I mean like I’m not getting you (0.4)  
 62 E: okay (0.3)  
 63 C: yeah exactly (0.4)  
 64 E: → was it a good (0.3)  
 65 C: oh [was ]  
 66 E: → [place]  
 67 C: it a good place I see [see I thought]  
 68 E: → [for children ]  
 69 C: that you were saying (.) what it s a good place like wa- (0.3) yeah  
 70 definitely it was (0.4)  
 71 E: mm hm (.)

(Part 1)

In the above case the question is repeated three times and the talk becomes a long repair sequence. When comprehension is finally achieved in line 69, only a very simple answer is provided and the candidate does not engage with the topic. In this case, then, repeated repetition does not result in helping the candidate display a high level of proficiency in his/her answer.

#### Extract 11

- 102 E: and (0.6) eh where (0.4) did you usually play. (1.7)  
 103 C: play (0.9)  
 104 E: play (.)  
 105 C: yes=  
 106 E: → =where (0.4)  
 107 C: like eh (0.7) cricket ((inaudible))=  
 108 E: → no where did you usually play (1.6)

- 109 C: so[rry ]  
 110 E: → [where] (0.6) where did you usually play (1.6)  
 111 C: sorry I can't get that (0.4)  
 112 E: → where (0.7)  
 113 C: where (1.1) I usually play? (1.3) mm s- eh (.)  
 114 E: → when you were a child (0.5)  
 115 C: yeah (0.5)  
 116 E: → where <did you play> (0.5)  
 117 C: eh well (.) eh as I told you that as this is divided into portions and  
 118 particularly the first portion which I (.) don't like,  
 (Part 1)

In Extract 11, there is a repair initiation in form of a partial repeat in line 103. The examiner repeats the question no fewer than five times, without being able to obtain an answer at the end of the cycle. Again, repetition as a repair operation does not always work so well.

#### Extract 12

- 116 E: I see (.) alright (1.9) do you generally enjoy (.) travelling (1.5)  
 117 C: sorry (0.6)  
 118 E: do you generally (.) enjoy (.) travelling (1.3)  
 119 C: eh (1.5) I think eh I want to eh eh (0.3) drive home in the car (1.0)  
 120 because eh (.) all the facilities and eh (0.3) mm save time car (0.5) car  
 121 save you time (0.3) and it give you [much]  
 122 E: [but ] do you enjoy (.) travelling  
 123 (2.3)  
 124 C: eh travelling? (0.5)  
 125 E: mm hm (0.7)  
 126 C: yeah I (0.6) eh (0.3) get travelling (0.4) eh (.) in (0.3) trip (0.9)  
 127 E: → do you enjoy (0.4) travelling (1.6)  
 128 C: yeah I have eh (0.4) fond of travelling eh somewhere (0.7) so because  
 129 eh (.) travelling it give you some time (0.3) to fresh your mind (0.5) and  
 130 eh (0.3) eh because eh life (0.3) is now (.) very eh h- eh (.) quick (0.3)  
 131 indeed eh (.) and we have not much time to travel (0.4) so it  
 132 give [you some] freshness  
 (Part 2)

In the above case the examiner repeats the question three times and this enables the candidate to finally provide a correct answer after the examiner has stressed the key word in line 127. In this particular case, the examiner has ignored the instructions and this has given a distinct advantage to this particular candidate. Other examples of excessive repetition in the data are: 0127, lines 60 onwards, repeats three times; 1106 lines 23 on, repeats twice; lines 97 on, repeats twice; 0272 lines 38 on, repeats four times; 0836, lines 23 on, repeats three times.

### 3.1.3 Lack of uptake to the prompt

We now consider what happens if the candidate does not answer the question directly. The instructions for examiners in this area are different for the three parts of the Test, as follows.

“How is the rating affected if the candidate answers the prompt without actually answering the question? This may be an indicator of inadequate lexis, and therefore that the candidate can only deal with familiar topics. It may also indicate a prepared answer.” (IELTS Examiner Training Material 2001, pp69, Part 1).

“The candidate misunderstands the task and talks off the topic. Let them go ahead; assessment is still on their ability to talk at length and unassisted for the required time...” (IELTS Examiner Training Material 2001, pp70, Part 2)

“The candidate does not seem to answer the questions directly. This may indicate inadequate lexis, or simply be a roundabout way of dealing with a difficult topic. It is a judgement call for the examiner.” (IELTS Examiner Training Material 2001, pp73, Part 3)

The vast majority of examiners follow these instructions and do not take action if candidates do not answer the question directly. However, in some exceptional cases, examiners do treat failure to provide a direct answer as trouble. The extracts below demonstrate a variety of behaviours by examiners.

*Extract 13*

- 36 E: alright (0.7) now let's move on to talk about some of the activities  
 37 you enjoy in your freetime (.) right? (1.5)  
 38 C: alright. Yeah (1.0)  
 39 E: when do you have free time? (1.5)  
 40 C: well I love to play on the computer (0.7) I love to travel with my  
 41 family to my farm (.) because I have a farm (.) and next to (5.6) and here  
 42 in (Bella renoche) I can say that I have a little stressed life? (1.0) because  
 43 I don't have time to do my stuff (0.7) well I (0.3) I (0.7) I like to be with  
 44 my friends (0.8) I like to go out with my friends (.) I like to go to the  
 45 movies (1.4) I like to be with my girlfriend (1.0) yes (1.2)  
 46 E: what free activities are most popular among your friends? (1.3)  
 47 C: most popular? well (0.7) study (0.4) at weekends (0.8) we have to study  
 48 because our course is=  
 49 E: → =so would you call it free time activities? =  
 50 C: =no (1.2) not free time activities free time activities we go to parties (0.7)  
 51 we go to the movies (1.6) and we travel together (1.9)  
 52 E: alright and how important is free time in people's lives? (0.7)  
 (Part 1)

In line 49 the examiner asks a supplementary unscripted question which implies that the question has not been answered and provides the candidate with an opportunity to self-repair, and in this case s/he is able to do so and provide a direct answer.

*Extract 14*

- 40 E: okay (0.6) let's talk about public transport (0.5) what kinds of public  
 41 transport are there (0.3) where you live (2.0)  
 42 C: it's eh (0.5) I (0.4) as eh (0.4) a (0.3) person of eh (0.4) ka- Karachi, I  
 43 (1.1) we have many (0.8) public transport problems and (0.7) many eh  
 44 we use eh (0.4) eh buses (0.4) there are private cars and eh (.) there are  
 45 some (0.3) eh (0.4) children (0.4) buses (0.8) and eh (1.9) abou- (0.2)  
 46 about the main problems in is the (0.4) the number one is the over eh  
 47 speeding (0.5) they are the oh eh (0.5) the roads (0.8) and eh (.) they are  
 48 [on]  
 49 E: → [I ] didn't ask you about the problems (0.6) my question was (0.6) what  
 50 kinds of public transport are there (.) where you live (0.7)  
 51 C: oh s- (.) sorry (0.5) eh I there (.) I live in (0.5) ((inaudible)) (0.4) so I  
 52 have eh (0.3) eh (0.4) t- we have there eh (0.4) private cars (0.5) and  
 53 some read  
 54 about the taxis and eh (0.3) local buses (0.5)  
 (Part 1)



In line 49 above the examiner explicitly treats the candidate's answer as trouble in that it did not provide a direct answer to his/her question, even though it was on the general topic of public transport. In this instance, the candidate is able to provide a direct answer.

In the data, the vast majority of examiners follow the instructions in relation to indirect candidate answers. In some cases, examiners do initiate repair of indirect answers and this generally results in candidates supplying direct answers as a result.

### 3.1.4 Vocabulary

“The examiner should not explain any vocabulary in the frame.” (Instructions to IELTS Examiners, pp5.)

#### Extract 15

- 63 E: what qualifications or certificates do you hope to get? (0.4)  
 64 C: sorry? (0.4)  
 65 E: what qualifications or (.) certificates (0.3) do you hope to get (2.2)  
 66 C: → could you ask me another way (.) I'm not quite sure (.) quite sure about  
 67 this (1.3)  
 68 E: it's alright (0.3) thank you (0.5) uh:: can we talk about your childhood?  
 69 (0.7)  
 (Part 1)

In the above extract the examiner follows the instructions perfectly, declines the request for clarification and moves on to the next question. In the data the vast majority of examiners follow the instructions in this way.

#### Extract 16

- 40 E: uh so (0.5) ↑how would you improve (0.4) the city you live in (1.8)  
 41 C: I:: (0.8) how do I pro::ve? (0.2)  
 42 E: how would you improve (.) the city (0.3)  
 43 C: sorry I don't know (.)  
 44 E: improve? (0.3)  
 45 C: yeah (.)  
 46 E: → how would you make the city better? (0.3)  
 47 C: → o:h yes (0.5)  
 (Part 1)

In Extract 16 the examiner does not follow the brief, explains the vocabulary item by providing a synonym and thus gives an advantage to the student, who indicates comprehension in line 47.

#### Extract 17

- 71 E: okay (0.3) uh:m what d'you think is the most important (0.6) household  
 72 task? (1.4)  
 73 C: household task? (0.4)  
 74 E: mm=  
 75 C: =uh:m sorry I [can't ]  
 76 E: → [most importa]nt job (.) in the house (0.8)  
 77 C: → in the house (1.5) uh:m (0.7) I think (0.4) the: most important job is (.)  
 78 cleaning hh (0.5) because my house is quite big (0.3)  
 (Part 1)

In a similar instance above, the examiner does not follow the brief, explains the vocabulary item by providing a synonym in line 76 and thus gives an advantage to the student, who is able to provide an answer in line 77.

*Extract 18*

236 C: hh because you know uh:: uh (0.3) we don't have uh:::m materials here  
 237 we don't have uh:: fuel or (.) petrol we don't have uh::: (0.2) ·hh  
 238 E: → resources (.) nature[al resour- ]  
 239 C: → [that's right w]e don't have natural resources  
 240 ((inaudible)) (0.8) uh: (0.3) we we have to work on on tourism  
 (Part 3)

In Extract 18 the examiner helps by supplying vocabulary to the candidate in line 238, which s/he subsequently employs in line 239. Although examiners have more flexibility in Part 3, they do not have a brief to supply vocabulary. In this sub-section, we have seen that the vast majority of examiners follow the instructions not to explain vocabulary. In some rare cases, examiners do not follow the instructions and provide an advantage to these candidates, who are generally able to exploit this help.

We can summarise the section on repair as follows. The organisation of repair in the Speaking Test is highly constrained and inflexible, and this is intended to ensure standardisation. In Part 1, the candidate may only initiate repair by requesting a single repetition of the question – no reformulation is permitted. The examiner rarely initiates repair. If a candidate turn is incomprehensible, error-ridden or irrelevant, there is no brief for the examiner to initiate repair in order to achieve intersubjectivity, except for the single repetition as and when requested. This is because candidate turns are produced for evaluation by the examiner. The design of repair in Part 1, then, has been tightly constrained in relation to the institutional goal of standardisation and fairness.

How does repair in the IELTS Speaking Test compare to that in other settings? In general, the organisation of repair in the IELTS Speaking Test differs very significantly from that described as operating in ordinary conversation (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977), L2 classroom interaction (Seedhouse, 2004) and from university interaction, (Benwell, 1996; Benwell & Stokoe, 2002; Stokoe 2000) which is the target form of interaction for most candidates. The literature on L2 classroom interaction (Seedhouse, 2004) and interaction in universities (Benwell, 1996; Benwell & Stokoe, 2002; Stokoe 2000) shows that many different forms and trajectories of repair are used in these settings. The lack of requirement (in Part 1) to achieve intersubjectivity produced by the test design creates a major difference between Speaking Test interaction and interaction in university seminars, tutorials and workshops, in which the achievement of intersubjectivity is a major institutional goal.

The organisation of repair is rationally designed in relation to the institutional attempt to standardise the interaction and thus assure reliability. However, given that the organisation of repair is unusual and cannot be anticipated by candidates, the worry is that some candidates may become confused and test performance is lowered. The evidence for this is that (as we have seen) some candidates request explanations of questions and multiple repetitions. In the IELTS Handbook and website available to students, and in most IELTS preparation books we examined, there was no statement on the organisation of repair; this was detailed, however, in 'IELTS On Track' (Slater, Millen & Tyrie, 2003). It is unclear to what extent candidates are aware of these repair rules. A mock Speaking Test may prepare candidates for these rules, but it is unclear how many candidates will have taken one. We would recommend that a very brief statement be included in written documentation for students, eg, "When you don't understand a question, you may ask the examiner to repeat it. The examiner will repeat this question only once. No explanations or rephrasing of questions will be provided." A further recommendation would be that examiners state the rules for repair towards the end of the opening sequence. An example of this choice is described in Egbert (1998).

Overall, the organisation of repair in the Speaking Test has a number of distinctive characteristics. Firstly, it is conducted according to strictly specified rules, in which the examiners have been briefed and trained. Secondly, the vast majority of examiners adhere rigidly to these rules, which are rationally designed to ensure standardisation and reliability. Some examiners do not follow the rules, and in these cases they provide a clear advantage to their candidates. Thirdly, the nature and scope of repair is extremely restricted because of this rational design. In particular, exact repetition of the question is used by examiners as the dominant means of responding to repair initiations by candidates. Fourthly, there is no requirement to achieve intersubjectivity in Part 1 of the Test.

### 3.2 Turn-taking and sequence

The overall organisation of turn-taking and sequence in the Speaking Test closely follows the examiner instructions. Part 1 is a succession of question-answer adjacency pairs. Part 2 is a long turn by the student, started off by a prompt from the examiner and sometimes rounded off with questions. Part 3 is another succession of question-answer adjacency pairs with slightly less rigid organisation than Part 1. This tight organisation of turn-taking and sequence is achieved in two ways. First of all, the examiner script specifies this organisation, for example “Now, in this first part, I’d like to ask you some questions about yourself.” (Examiner script, January 2003). Secondly, many candidates have undertaken training for the Test, and in some cases this will have included a mock Speaking Test.

#### 3.2.1 The introduction section

“One of the key features of the IELTS Speaking Test is the importance placed on making the candidate feel as relaxed and as much at ease as possible within the confines of an examination.” (Instructions to IELTS Examiners, pp3).

However, the administrative business in the introduction section sometimes works against this and has the potential to create interactional trouble at the start. In the introduction section, the examiner must create a relaxed atmosphere, but at the same time perform introductions and verify the candidate’s identity. Because this administrative business has to take place before the Test as such begins, a switch of identity is involved for both participants which may tend to work against the intention to create a relaxed atmosphere. When verifying ID, the professional is adopting a gatekeeping or administrative identity and a quasi-policing function; the candidate has the identity of person-being-identified. When this business is concluded, the identities switch to examiner and candidate. The ‘policing’ function is evident in the extract below.

#### *Extract 19*

- 1 E: could you (0.4) tell me your full name please (0.6)  
 2 C: ((name omitted)) (0.7)  
 3 E: thank you and (0.4) do you have your identification with you please  
 4 [that’s]  
 5 C: [yes ] exactly I sure do have the passport! (1.1) and I do have the  
 6 national I.D. card (0.8)  
 7 E: I think it’s your (0.4) oh (5.0) passport that I need  
 8 C: (4.0) yes please  
 9 E: → (6.3) is this you? (0.3)  
 10 C: exactly ma’am I didn’t have my moustaches so that’s why (0.4) I went for  
 11 a clean shave(0.7) so that’s why I’ve got a chin (0.4) I’m s- (0.5)  
 12 E: → you look older on that one=  
 13 C: =yeah exactly (0.6) that’s my mummy told me the same thing  
 14 E: → (27.2) right (1.2) thank you (0.5)

(Part 1)

In Extract 19, then, the administrative business works in opposition to the aim of creating a relaxed atmosphere. The examiner challenges the candidate twice in relation to his identity and the 27.2 second pause before the examiner finally accepts the candidate's identity is by far the longest pause in the data.

*Extract 20*

- 1 E: .hh well good evening=my name is ((first name)) ((last name))=  
 2 can you tell me your full name please.=  
 3 C: =yes ((first name,)) ((last name.))  
 4 E: .hh ah: a:n[d,  
 4b C: [ghm=  
 4c E: → =can you tell me er, what shall I ca:ll you.  
 4d (1.5)  
 5 C: e:r (1.0) can you repeat the: er the question[(s),?  
 6 E: [( ) what do you, (0.2)  
 7 E: your first name? do you use [(last name))  
 7b C: [( ) ((first name))  
 8 E: ((first name)). [(first name)) (you want me to call you) ((first na[me))  
 8b C: [yes ((first name)) [yes  
 9 E: °right.° ((with forced sound release))  
 10 E: .hh and can I see your identifi<cation: card please.>  
 10b (0.5)  
 10c C: .h[hm-  
 11 E: → [an ID. .hh er: not a student card=do you have an I [D °card? °  
 12 C: [ ↑e:::m  
 13 C: no::=in, (0.2) tch! no.  
 13b (0.5)  
 13c C: tch! er I don't er (0.2) .h I don't have (1.3) the: (1.0)  
 13d administration,=er: the day.  
 14 E: → m:: I understa:nd but you erm .h need to ha:ve, a: tch! (0.2) your officia:l,  
 15 C: yes  
 16 E: → ID card.  
 17 C: ye:s.  
 17b (1.5)  
 18 E: .hh thank yer .hh erm in this first part↓ I'd like to s=ask some questions  
 19 about your↑self. .hh em >well first of all can you tell me where you're<  
 19b fro↑m↓  
 (Part 1)

The above introduction sequence creates considerable interactional problems and a full analysis of the test (Appendix 2) suggests that the candidate has been thrown by this initial sequence and never recovers.

The question “What shall I call you?” created significant problems for the candidate above and very occasionally in other cases. Sometimes the question and answer sequence for this question is negotiated smoothly, as in Extract 21.

*Extract 21*

- 1 E: could you tell me your full name please (.)  
 2 C: yes (.) I'm ((name omitted)) (0.6)  
 3 E: thank you (0.6) and (.) what shall I call you (.) ((name omitted))? or  
 4 (0.9)  
 5 C: ((name omitted)) (0.6)  
 6 E: right (0.7) my name's ((name omitted)) (0.8) em (0.4) can I see your  
 7 identification please (0.4)  
 (Part 1)

The examiner asks the question and the answer of a nickname is provided by the candidate without trouble arising. However, the examiner does not actually use the candidate's nickname as provided later on during the course of the interview. It is therefore unclear what the purpose of asking the question is. See also 0394, lines 5-9 for another example of this. We should also note that, in cases where candidates do have a nickname or pet name which is different to their ID name, they sometimes volunteer this (see 0126, line 1 for another example):

*Extract 22*

- 1 E: good afternoon my name is ((name omitted))  
 2 C: my name is ((name omitted)) oh well you can call me ((name omitted))  
 3 because I was studying university everybummy (0.3) everybody call me  
 4 ((name omitted)) so (0.5) everybody (0.7) because this ((name omitted))  
 5 is quite close to my given name at first ((name omitted)) ((spelling out  
 6 name)) (.) and ((spelling out nickname)) so (0.7) s=  
 7 E: =o[kay]  
 (Part 1)

As this question can cause problems to candidates, and as candidates sometimes volunteer a nickname if they have one, it is recommended that the question be deleted.

**3.2.2 Transition between parts of the test and between question sequences**

Transitions between sequences are marked more or less explicitly by examiners in accordance with their written script. An example of the change from Part 2 to Part 3 of the test can be observed between lines 217-220 of the following segment.

*Extract 23*

- 216 E: mm h[m ]  
 217 C: [and] (2.0) and and and most people I know (1.2)  
 218 E: alright we've been talking this piece of equipment which you find useful  
 219 (0.6) and I'd like to discuss with you one or more general questions  
 220 related to this (0.6) okay? (0.2) comes to the first of all (0.3) attitudes to  
 221 technology (1.2) can you describe the attitude of all the people (.) in  
 222 modern technology (0.7)

Although the examiner above does not specify that s/he is moving from Part 2 to Part 3 of the test, the wording implies a transition from a previous focus to a new but related focus.

We now consider what examiners say on receiving an answer from the candidate and to mark the transition to the next question within Part 1 of the test.

*Extract 24*

- 25 E: → okay so what do you like most (0.3) about your studies (1.7)  
 26 C: uh the variety (0.4) I think in: medicine especially because no: two  
 27 patients will present the same way (0.4) and i- it's always a challenge to  
 28 figure out what the diagnosis is (0.3) and uh ways in which you can (.)  
 29 confirm the diagnosis °basically° (0.2)  
 30 E: → okay (0.4) are there any things you ↑don't like about your studies? (2.7)  
 31 C: well personally the fact that (.) if I read something I have to read it again  
 32 you know to remember it (.) it's just a lot (.) the volume of work is very  
 33 very large so it's just (0.2) time management (0.2) and learning to deal  
 34 with the: (0.2) °(volume of work)° (0.3)  
 35 E: → okay (0.7) so uh:: what qualifications or certificates (0.8) do you hope to  
 36 get (1.3)  
 (Part 1)

In the Test from which the above extract is taken, the examiner says ‘okay’ 21 times at the start of the receipt slot (the point directly after the candidate’s answer), with seven of those instances being a double ‘okay’ and the end of the test being marked with a triple ‘okay’.

We now consider the issue of how examiners signal to the candidate that the examiner wants to listen further. In the Training Manual, items are listed which in CA literature have been termed “continuers” (eg Goodwin 1986). These display understanding to the current speaker and indicate that the listener passes the opportunity to take the next turn. “Examiners should keep non-verbal interjections to a minimum. (Eg ‘um’, ‘right’, ‘uh uh’.)” (IELTS Examiner Training Material 2001, pp6). “How do examiners acknowledge something candidate has said? By adopting a listening pose and maintaining eye contact. NOT by commenting or giving too much audible acknowledgement.” (IELTS Examiner Training Material 2001, pp69. Part 1). While the audio tapes do not allow us to examine the non-vocal aspects of the interaction, the transcripts indicate that examiners make frequent use of continuers.

*Extract 25*

- 15 E: you some questions about yourself (0.7) em (0.3) let’s talk about what  
 16 you do (.) do you work or are you a student (1.0)  
 17 C: actually: (1.1) I- no (.) I am not a student right now (0.3)  
 18 E: → mm hm (.)  
 19 C: I did my (.) engineering some (0.3) three years back (0.4)  
 20 E: → mm hm (0.6)  
 21 C: and then I started working for my father (0.6) and (0.6) family for (0.3)  
 22 E: → mm [hm]  
 23 C: [it’s] construction business I’m in (.)  
 24 E: → mm hm, (0.7) okay so tell me about your job (1.5)  
 25 C: right now (0.5) we don’t have a job at all (0.5)  
 26 E: → mm hm, (0.4)

(Part 1)

The examiner in the above extract uses ‘mm hm’ to pass on taking the turn, and ‘okay’ to mark that the answer turn is finished and that the examiner will produce another question. Generally in the data, ‘Mm hm’ provides a non-committal, non-evaluative display of attention. ‘Okay’ marks receipt of a complete turn and marks transition to the next question. In neither case does the candidate know the degree of the examiner’s understanding.

The issue of examiners’ use of continuers is of particular importance in relation to Part 2 of the Test. In many transcripts there is no verbalised feedback from the examiner at all during Part 2, for example in transcript 0415.

*Extract 26*

- 244 C: so this is a need of (.) this thing (0.7) so (1.1) some people use (.) eh  
 245 are using (.) these things (.) eh this thing but (0.3) not most of the  
 246 people (.)  
 247 E: mm hm=  
 248 C: =so in my view it is (.) eh (0.9) eh it should be (1.2) the: necessity (.) of  
 249 our >home town< ↑not my home towns (0.5) all the countryside a-  
 250 actually all seventy per- eh percent of population is living in the (.)  
 251 countryside (.)  
 252 E: mm hm (.)

(Part 2)

In Extract 26, by contrast, the examiner uses ‘mm hm’ more frequently, a total of 5 times throughout the test. There are arguments for consistent conduct by examiners in the use of markers in the receipt slot and at turn transition relevance spaces (points at which turn change can occur). The use of ‘okay’ and ‘mm hm’ does not appear to cause any trouble in interaction, is designed by examiners and understood by candidates to be non-evaluative and appears suitable in that they do not generate any instances of trouble in the data.

We would therefore recommend, in the interests of consistency and standardisation, that examiner instructions should be that “okay” is used in the receipt slot to mark transition to the next question and that “mm hm” be used as a continuer, ie as a signal that the candidate is encouraged to continue talking. This would be particularly useful in Part 2. A more systematic video analysis would be necessary to shed light on the systematic use of body posture, eye contact, head movements, handling of the written materials and similar behaviours in connection with turn transition, signals of understanding and displays of section closings.

### 3.2.3 Evaluation

The Instructions for Examiners tell examiners to avoid expressing evaluations of candidate responses: “Do not make any unsolicited comments or offer comments on performance.” (IELTS Examiner Training Material, 2001, pp5). It is very noticeable in the data that examiners do not verbalise positive or negative evaluations of candidate talk, with some very rare exceptions. In this aspect the interaction is rather different to interaction in classrooms of all kinds, in which an evaluation move by the teacher in relation to learner talk is an extremely common finding, in relation to L1 classrooms (eg Mehan, 1979) as well as in L2 classrooms (Westgate et al, 1985). It is also different to interaction in university settings (Benwell, 1996; Benwell & Stokoe, 2002; Stokoe 2000).

Examiners follow these instructions, and we found only very few aberrant cases. In the following two data excerpts, examiners produced evaluations of candidate talk.

#### Extract 27

- 16 C: eh (1.3) actually eh (0.3) it’s very interesting job eh (.) it is (0.3)  
 17 especially in my eh (0.8) department (0.4) that is specialised (.)  
 18 department that is eh (0.3) microbiology (0.8) in eh eh interesting  
 19 ((inaudible)) (0.5) [I enjoy it]  
 20 E: → [yes yes ] mm yes (0.3) good (0.5) are there any  
 21 things you don’t like about your work (1.1)  
 22 C: lot of things I like to do (0.5) as a pharmacist because eh (.) pharmacist  
 23 are (1.1) eh complicated persons in pharmaceuticals so=  
 24 E: =yes (0.9)  
 25 C: eh (0.3) but the whole department is (0.4) very interesting for me (0.9)  
 26 [mm hm]  
 27 E: → [good! ] (1.0) eh (.) do you have any plans to change your job in the  
 28 future (1.1)  
 (Part 1)

#### Extract 28

- 108 E: ((inaudible)) and have you any plans to change your job? (1.7)  
 109 C: na:h (0.4) I don’t think I will change my job? After I come back to  
 110 Vietnam (.) because when I came here (0.4) to New Zealand (0.3) I quit  
 111 my job (.) but my ex boss said that I could return to my office (.) if I  
 112 wish to (0.4) but I think that it’s time for me to set up my own business=  
 113 E: → =very good!=  
 114 C: =yeah (0.4) I plan to (.) set up my business to ((inaudible)) educational  
 115 (1.1) I set up my business (0.6)  
 116 E: → very good (1.7)  
 (Part 1)

It appears to be the case that L2 teachers often provide positive or negative evaluations of learner talk when teaching in class. However, when the same teachers assume the examiner role in a Speaking Test, they generally do not verbalise evaluations of candidate talk. The explanation appears to lie in the rational design of these two different varieties of institutional talk. In the L2 classroom the institutional goal is that “the teacher will teach the learners the L2” (Seedhouse, 2004:183). In this institutional setting, positive or negative evaluations of learner talk are formative and designed to help the learners learn. The instructor’s main aim is to teach and evaluate learner talk, at least in many teaching methods. However, in the IELTS test, the institutional goal is to “...assess the language ability of candidates...” (IELTS Handbook, pp2). The Speaking Test is not part of an ongoing programme of study. Moreover, a summative evaluation of language ability is provided formally and in writing after the Speaking Test has taken place. The examiner’s aim is to provide an assessment, but the result is not provided to the candidate immediately. It may be that one way in which examiners talk into being a formal examination is precisely by avoiding the positive or negative evaluations of learner talk typical of the classroom. Examiner behaviour here is a striking example of professional caution and asymmetry of access to knowledge, ie the evaluation and scoring of learner talk. It appears that this lack of positive or negative evaluations of candidate talk is related to the rational design of the institutional setting and is therefore appropriate. However, we should note that this creates a striking difference between Speaking Test talk, L2 classroom interaction and interaction in universities, which is the target destination for most candidates. We therefore recommend that candidates be informed about this aspect of examiners’ conduct beforehand.

### 3.3 Topic

In the Speaking Test, the topic of the talk is pre-determined by the central administration, is written out in advance and is introduced by the examiner. Candidates are evaluated on (among other things) their ability to develop a nominated topic (see IELTS band descriptors). Topic is intended to be developed differently in the different parts of the test: “Can examiners ask a follow-up question from something candidate has said? No.” (IELTS Examiner Training Material 2001, pp69. Part 1). “Can the examiner ask an unscripted follow-up question in Part 3? Yes.” (IELTS Examiner Training Material 2001, pp71)

Usually, candidates follow the examiner’s topic nomination wherever possible; however, there are some very rare cases in which the candidate attempts to determine the topic. Note that in the example below (lines 125 ff), the candidate asks whether she can talk about a specific aspect of the prompted topic. This is denied. So even in Part 3 the examiner does not allow the candidate to shift topic.

#### Extract 29

- 118 let’s talk about public and private transport (0.6) can you describe (.) the  
 119 public transport systems in your country (1.0)  
 120 C: I used to have eh the main eh (2.0) public transport and th- (0.3) the main  
 121 transport which are (0.3) which is used by the public are the (0.5) buses  
 122 (0.7) secondly if eh (0.3) there are some eh urgent eh they use the taxis  
 123 investment plans the banks are (.) given (0.5) and eh (0.3) the main eh is  
 124 the (0.5) the (1.8) transport is eh (1.5) is eh bad (0.7) today have eh (0.9)  
 125→ can’t I talk about the (0.3) problems (1.1)  
 126 E: → no=  
 127 C: =no (1.1)  
 128 E: just describe (.) the public transport systems [in you country ]  
 129 C: [eh describe the main]  
 130 transport system which [I ]  
 131 E: [okay] (0.5) now (0.5) I would like you to  
 132 evaluate (0.8) the advantages of private (.) and public transport (1.5)  
 133 C: okay (1.7) first eh (.) talking about (0.4) the eh (0.5) private transport eh  
 (Part 3)



In Extract 30 below we see the issues of topic, interpretation of topic, question repetition and direct answers to questions converging. The examiner appears to engage with the topics the candidate talks about in lines 40, 42, 44, 46, 48, 50 and 52. The candidate answers are not direct answers to the question, but are clearly related to the overall topic of childhood. Of special interest is the candidate's response in lines 50 and 52, where he provides a completely logical answer, which, however, is treated as a misunderstanding since, apparently, the examiner expected a different interpretation.

*Extract 30*

- 39 E: ·hh where did you grow up, (0.8)  
 40 C: eh (.) in my childhood I was eh very naughty! (.)  
 41 E: yes, (0.7)  
 42 C: I p- eh (.) I played with my er friends, (.)  
 43 E: yes (0.7) where did you play (0.7)  
 44 C: eh (0.7) t- cricket, (0.6)  
 45 E: ah yes (1.1)  
 46 C: eh (.) fly kiting, (0.6)  
 47 E: yes (0.9)  
 48 C: and eh othe::r (0.8) things eh (0.6)  
 49 E: and where (.) where did you grow up ((name omitted)) (1.6)  
 50→ C: em (.) grow eh with my (0.6) parents (.)  
 51 E: yes=  
 52→ C: =eh (.) m- my (.) especially my dad (0.6) very good eh (.)  
 53 E: I see (.) and where did you grow up (1.4)  
 54 C: ((inaudible)) (0.3)  
 55 E: where (0.5) did you grow up (1.3)  
 56 C: ((inaudi[ble]))  
 57 E: [yeah ] ·hh (.) okay (.) do you think childhood is different today  
 58 from when you were a child, (1.4)

(Part 1)

The examiner says 'yes' five times in response to the candidate's turns and this appears to be positive evaluation. However, at the same time the examiner repeats the question 'where did you grow up?' three times. This shows that the examiner is treating the candidate's answer as a failure to provide an adequate response as trouble. The examiner's "yes"-receipts and his question repetition appear to be mutually contradictory, with one signalling approval and the other signalling trouble. The examiner is deviating from instructions in two regards, by expressing evaluations and by multiple repetitions of the question.

### 3.3.1 Topic disjunction

In this section we examine instances in which scripted questions generate trouble and topic disjunction (in which the flow of topic is disturbed). We examine firstly the question "Would you like to be in a film?" (Part 1 of the Test), which causes trouble for a striking number of candidates. In the examiner script this follows the questions: "Do you enjoy watching films? How often do you watch films? Do people generally prefer watching films at home or in a cinema?" The interesting point is that in the script, there is no indication that the question might be topic disjunctive, as it is clearly continuing the topic of films. However, in the flow of interaction, eight candidates found it difficult to understand the question, even in cases where the candidate has no problems with understanding all of the other questions in the test. This is out of a total of 32 candidates who were asked this question in the data. In the following two examples we see how the trouble and repair sequences typically unfold after this question.

*Extract 31*

- 57 C: .hh err I (0.4) watch most films (0.8) usually after work (1.5) er  
 58 sometimes sometimes I see two (.) film in a week (.) only  
 59 E: mm hm (1.8) would you like to be in a film (.) yourself?  
 60 C: (2.0) pardon.(1.1)  
 61 E: would you like to be in a film. (1.0)  
 62 C: err:: if I was:: an actor? (.)  
 63 E: hmm (1.0)  
 64 C: no I don't. I don't like it. (2.1)

(Part 1)

*Extract 32*

- 66 E: alright=  
 67 C: =yeah (0.2)  
 68 E: do- do uhm would you like to be (0.3) in a film (0.3)  
 69 C: oh I like going to the cinema (0.2)  
 70 E: but would you like to be in (0.3) a film (0.6)  
 71 C: uh::m (2.3)  
 72 E: → actress (0.8)  
 73 C: actress (.) actre::ss (0.9)  
 74 E: → would you like to be? (0.3)  
 75 C: yeah (0.9) I like=  
 76 E: =why would you like? (0.6)  
 77 C: uh::m (0.5) because (0.9) I I saw a film (0.4) include uh hero (0.3) and a  
 78 heroine (0.3) I think the heroine is very very beautiful (0.8) I really like it

(Part 1)

In Extract 32, we see that the examiner deviates from instructions by modifying the question in lines 72 and 74. This may be due to the ambiguity of the prompt. Other examples of trouble with this question can be found in extracts 0099, lines 73 on; 0127, lines 83 on; 0394, lines 161 on; 0144, lines 72 on.

We cannot know for certain why the question created so much interactional trouble for so many candidates. However, the explanation appears to involve a shift in perspectives. The previous questions about films involved the candidates in continuing their normal perspective as visitors to cinemas and viewers of films. The problem question involves an unmarked and unmotivated shift in perspective to a fantasy question in which candidates have to imagine they had the opportunity to be a film star. As we can see in the following extracts, some candidates say they have never thought about this and have difficulty with the shift in perspective:

*Extract 33*

- 78 (0.4) if I watch a film by video (0.7) it is cheaper than theatre (.) but if  
 79 I have a family (0.4) I choose (0.6) watching in my home (1.3)  
 80 E: right (.) right (0.5) would you like to be in a film? (1.1)  
 81 C: pardon (0.9)  
 82 E: would would you like to be in a film (0.8) like be an actress=  
 83 C: → =ahhh (0.4) I never think about that! hhh (0.6) of course if I have a chance  
 84 (.) of course haha huh huh (1.4)  
 85 E: ha ha huh of course (0.7) right

(Part 1)

*Extract 34*

- 66           cinema maybe you: just uh uhm can uh can see once (0.9)  
 67    E:       would you like to be in a film ((name omitted))? (0.9)  
 68    C:       sorry? (0.2)  
 69    E:       would you like to be in a film (2.1)  
 70    C: → I: (0.3)  
 71    E:       yes you (0.5)  
 72    C:       no:: hh heh (0.7)  
 73    E:       okay let's talk about shopping now (.)

(Part 1)

Further examples of questions which cause trouble are now provided. The question below is “*Could you speculate on how much of today's technology will still be in use in 50 years' time?*”

*Extract 35*

- 148   E:       thank you (0.6) and could you speculate (.) on how much of today's  
 149       technology (0.7) w- may still be in use (.) in fifty years' time (3.9)  
 150   C:       °sorry° (0.8)  
 151   E:       could you speculate on how much of <today's technology> (0.9) will  
 152       still be in use (.) in fifty year's time (0.3)  
 153   C:       in fifty years time eh (0.5) there will be more advance ((inaudible)) (0.9)  
 154       to ((inaudible)) (0.7) more things will be in the market (.) available (0.6)  
 155       and more easy life (0.3) there will be (0.8)

(Part 3) For a similar example, see 0338, lines 188-201.

It is unclear whether the trouble is lexical in nature (speculate) or whether the change in perspective to the imaginary is problematic.

*Extract 36*

- 175   E:       could you speculate on (.) future developments in the transport system  
 176       (4.6)  
 177   C:       eh (.) in what sense (0.6)  
 178   E:       well what do you think we're likely to see in the future (.) how will  
 179       people travel (1.1)  
 180   C:       eh (0.8) no (.)  
 181   E:       any (0.6) further developments (1.0)  
 182   C:       normally eh (.) the development could be made in the (0.7) in cars side of  
 183       the (0.3) transport (0.6) that eh (0.3) cars in more (.) fuel economised  
 184       (0.3) and eh (.) pollution aspect can be (0.3)  
 185   E:       mm=

(Part 3)

The question in Extract 36 is slightly different from the preceding one. However, it contains the same lexical item and the same imaginary perspective.

In Extract 37, the scripted question is “*Can we talk about your childhood? Are you happy to do that?*”

*Extract 37*

- 63    E: → mm hm (0.9) now can we talk about your childhood (0.6) are you happy  
 64       to do that? (0.8)  
 65    C:       eh (.) happy to repeat that? (.)  
 66    E:       ah [eh]  
 67    C:       [ha]ppy to remember that=  
 68    E:       =are you happy to talk about your childhood (.)  
 69    C:       eh (0.6) [ee ]  
 70    E:       [now] where did you grow up (0.4)  
 71    C: → yes (.) not too quite happy (0.4) because it was (0.4) eh actually divided

- 72 into: eh multiple different portions (0.7) eh like I was born somewhere  
 73 else (.) not where (0.3) where I am living now=  
 74 E: → =mm so would you prefer to talk about some (0.3) something else? (0.8)  
 75 C: eh like (0.6) eh no no (.) I-I I mean to say (.) that I [don't ]  
 76 E: [you're] happy to talk  
 77 a[bout ]  
 78 C: [yeah]  
 79 E: it (0.3) so where did you grow up (1.4)  
 (Part 1)

In the above extract, considerable trouble talk arises due to a confusion as to what exactly 'happy' is referencing; the candidate takes it to be referencing the topic of childhood and starts explaining that some parts of his childhood were happy and others not. In line 74 we see that the examiner takes this reply to mean that the candidate is not happy to discuss his childhood. This appears to be the only frame in which candidates are asked for their consent to discuss the topic; elsewhere they clearly have no choice. Candidates may find this a source of confusion.

In this section we have seen that a sequence of questions on a particular topic may appear unproblematic in advance of implementation. However, this may nonetheless be a cause of unforeseen trouble for candidates, especially if an unmotivated and unprepared shift in perspective of any kind is involved. Piloting of questions (if not already undertaken) would therefore be recommended.

### 3.3.2 Recipient design and rounding-off questions

In a number of instances in the data, trouble arises in relation to specific rounding-off questions in Part 2. Their purpose is stated as follows: "The rounding-off questions at the end of Part 2 ... provide a short response to the candidate's long turn and closure for Part 2 before moving on to Part 3. However, there may be occasions when these questions are inappropriate or have already been covered by the candidate, in which case they do not have to be used." (Instructions to IELTS Examiners, pp6).

These types of questions are sometimes topically disjunctive in practice as they may not fit into the flow of interaction and topic which has developed. "*Does everyone you know use this piece of equipment?*" is a rounding-off question to be used after a Part 2 talk on "a piece of equipment which you find very useful". In a number of cases the question is experienced as disjunctive and problematic by candidates. In the extract below the candidate has described a computer.

#### Extract 38

- 202 E: okay (0.3)  
 203 C: indispensable (0.4)  
 204 E: okay (0.4) does everyone you know use this piece of equipment (1.0)  
 205 C: pardon? (0.5)  
 206 E: does does everyone you know↑ use this piece of equipment (0.6)  
 207 C: you mean my particular one? (0.7)  
 208 E: uh: not your I- but=  
 209 C: =a computer  
 210 E: right (1.0)  
 211 C: most people I know nowadays  
 212 E: mm hm  
 213 C: have access to a computer some use it more than others  
 (Part 2)

The above candidate has spoken fluently throughout the interview without repair, but encounters difficulty with this question, even after repetition. This may well be due to the scripted nature of the question. It is unusual that an object already referred to as “a computer” would later be referred to as “this piece of equipment”. A shift in perspective is also evident in the question; previously they had been talking about the equipment which the candidate uses and the shift is to whether other people s/he knows use the equipment.

*Extract 39*

- 92 (0.2) or er (0.2) funny story (.) can make me er (0.3) erm er er (0.4) can  
 93 make me to relax  
 94 E: OK thanks (.) alright er does everyone you know er use the computer?  
 95 C: (3.0) actually er can you repeat please?  
 96 E: yeah (0.2) does every one (.) you know use the computer  
 97 C: (6.3) I think er computer is very useful for me (0.8) erm tend to  
 98 computer (0.2) I can er (2.3) er (2.3) I can er I can improve my language  
 99 E: uh hum, ok (.) so er do you enjoy using the computer?  
 100 C: yes I enjoy it very much  
 (Part 2)

In Extract 39, even after repetition, the candidate still does not understand the question. The examiner then switches to the other additional question, which is successfully answered.

In the extract below the candidate (a doctor) has described a stethoscope.

*Extract 40*

- 257 C: =so that really convinced me that (.) this is a key instrument for us (0.6)  
 258 and [I ]  
 259 E: [yes]  
 260 C: think it's really helpful in diagnosing the diseases (0.3)  
 261 E: right (0.3) thank you (0.7) em (.) eh does everyone you know use this  
 262 piece of equipment (0.3)  
 263 C: eh sorry? (0.8)  
 264 E: does everyone you know (0.5) use this piece of equi[pment]  
 265 C: → [ah ] yes as I told  
 266 you that eh we (.) even in dramas and every person have eh  
 267 supposed to face a doctor som- eh (0.3) at one or the other time (0.6) so I  
 268 don't think so (.) that this is an instrument eh (0.3) which is not well  
 269 known by the other people (0.5)  
 (Part 2)

The candidate is a medical consultant and the piece of equipment he described is a stethoscope. The question is topically disjunctive and the candidate's answer (lines 265 ff) shows a degree of confusion with the function of the question. Clearly, a stethoscope is a piece of medical equipment and it is not possible that everyone he knows uses it.

In Extract 41, the candidate is also a medical consultant and the piece of equipment he described is a colonoscope.

*Extract 41*

- 223 (0.3) so (.) em (0.3) we had (0.4) scope then (0.5) so it is used °to help us°  
 224 ((°inaudible°)) (0.2)  
 225 E: okay (.) thank you (0.3) and eh (0.3) does eh (0.6) anyone else you know  
 226 use this piece of equipment (0.9)  
 227 C: → em (0.6) in eh (0.3) well (.) every eh (0.3) I think all the specialists the  
 228 (0.3) mm in eh (.) in EST as (0.3) they use them (.) and em (0.9) in our  
 229 hospital (.) I'm in charge of this (0.6) equipment because I'm the senior  
 230 doctor (0.4) I teach them to my junior doctors (0.2)

231 E: mm=  
 232 C: =and the doctors the medical people also use it (0.3) gastro-enterologists  
 233 (0.3)  
 (Part 2)

In terms of recipient design, then, the examiner's follow-up question (lines 225-6) seems very odd and disconnected from the previous flow of interaction. The candidate (who obtained a score of 8.0 and speaks extremely fluently elsewhere) shows definite signs of confusion in line 227. Clearly, a colonoscope is a highly specialised piece of equipment and any question about whether other people use it is likely to sound strange. In this case we should perhaps just be grateful that the examiner did not ask the alternative rounding-off question "Do you enjoy using this piece of equipment?" Other instances of trouble in relation to rounding-off questions may be found in 0304, lines 117-121; 0589, lines 133-138; 0099, lines 120-126.

We have seen that these rounding-off questions can appear disjunctive and actually create trouble when they are worded in such a way that they ignore the local context in which they are produced. We now examine three instances of examiners modifying the rounding-off question to provide good recipient design, which maintains the flow of the topic and interaction and avoids interactional trouble. In the extract below the candidate has described a mobile phone.

*Extract 42*

121 people can contact you. (0.5) anytime (0.7) because you use (.) your own  
 122 cell phone (0.5) and this is the big (.) advantage of mobile phone (0.4)  
 123 and that's why (.) I use to prefer it ((°inaudible°)) (0.8)  
 124 E: → so (0.5) um (1.7) does everyone you know carry a mobile phone now?  
 125 (2.4)  
 126 C: just not (.) not much (1.2) mm lot of people (0.3) lot of people are not  
 127 carrying the mobile phone (0.4) but (0.9) eh what eh (0.3) in now (.) it's  
 128 eh (0.4) thirty or forty percent (0.8) mm of people who work in offices (.)  
 129 and who are working in a marketing and (0.3) other places (.) they use  
 (Part 2)

In Extract 42 the examiner modifies the rounding-off question to the sequential environment or flow of topic and this proves effective in smoothly continuing and rounding off the topic, as well as enabling the candidate to understand the question and provide an appropriate answer.

*Extract 43*

160 writing skills (0.7) and it also helps you i:n improving your intelligence  
 161 and doing other things (0.6)  
 162 E: → °mm hm° okay thank you (2.7) does everyone you know (.) in your  
 163 family enjoy (.) writing? (0.9)  
 164 C: yes I do my elder sister is: uh: working (0.2) for a newspaper which is  
 165 called Times of India (0.3)  
 166 E: mm hm (0.2)  
 (Part 2)

In Extract 43 the candidate has described a pen. Again the question is adapted to the flow of interaction and to the candidate's circumstances. Hence, the candidate is able to develop the topic very smoothly.

*Extract 44*

118 the plough is used to (.) it's not very simple (.) it's not very sophisticated  
 119 (.) but we call it appropriate technology (.) so it can be used (.) i'm sure  
 120 it's very widely used in Botswana (.) because it's always pulled by oxen  
 121 (.) they are pulled by oxen (.) needed to (.)  
 122 E: → does everyone you know use a plough like that to (.) in the village

123            where you live?  
124    C:        er (.) I could say sixty percent of people use the plough (.) because they  
125            can not afford to pay for tractor  
(Part 2)

In Extract 44 the candidate has described a plough. The question is adapted to include the specific item of equipment and a specific location and the candidate is able to provide an answer without trouble.

In each of the three examples above, the examiners have used the name of the equipment rather than “piece of equipment” to refer to it and in two cases the examiners have adapted the question to what they have learnt during the test of the candidate’s personal and local circumstances. Thus there is a case for training examiners in how to adapt the rounding-off questions slightly to fit seamlessly into the previous flow of the interaction. The training could include some of the examples given above, explain the topic disjunction problems which can arise with unmodified rounding-off questions and provide examples of questions which have been successfully adapted to topic flow. Training should also stress that the questions are optional and that in some instances it might not be possible at all to adapt them to the flow of the interaction.

#### 4        ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question is:

*How is interaction organised in the three parts of the Speaking Test?*

The organisation of turn-taking, sequence and repair are tightly and rationally organised in relation to the institutional goal of ensuring valid and reliable assessment of English speaking proficiency. In general, the interaction is organised according to the instructions for examiners: In Part 1, candidates answer general questions about a range of familiar topic areas. In Part 2 (Individual long turn) the candidate is given a verbal prompt on a card and is asked to talk on a particular topic. The examiner may ask one or two rounding-off questions. In Part 3 the examiner and candidate engage in a discussion of more abstract issues and concepts which are thematically linked to the topic prompt in Part 2. The overwhelming majority of tests adhere very closely to examiner instructions. The test is intended to provide variety in terms of task type and patterns of interaction, and in general this is achieved. However, the interaction is very restricted in ways detailed below.

*How and why does interactional trouble arise and how is it repaired by the interactants?*

There are two basic ways in which interactional trouble may arise. Either a speaker has trouble in speaking (self-initiated repair) or something the other co-participant uttered is not heard or understood properly (other-initiated repair). In the interviews analysed, trouble generally arises for candidates when they do not understand questions posed by examiners. In these cases, candidates usually initiate repair by requesting question repetition. Occasionally, they ask for a re-formulation or explanation of the question. Sometimes interactional trouble can be created (even for the best candidates) by questions which are topically disjunctive, and a number of examples of this are provided.

Examiners very rarely initiate repair in relation to candidate utterances, even when these contain linguistic errors or appear to be incomprehensible. This is because the institutional brief is not to achieve intersubjectivity, nor to offer formative feedback; it is to assess the candidate’s utterances in terms of IELTS bands. Therefore, a poorly-formed, incomprehensible utterance can be assessed and banded in the same fashion as a perfectly-formed, comprehensible utterance. Repair initiation by examiners is not rationally necessary from the institutional perspective in either case. In this way, Speaking Test interaction differs significantly from interaction in classrooms and university settings,

in which the achievement of intersubjectivity is highly valued and assumed to be relevant at all times. In those institutional settings, the transmission of knowledge or skills from teacher to learner is one goal, with repair being a mechanism used to ensure that this transmission has taken place.

*What types of repair initiation are used by examiners and examinees and how are these responded to?*

Repair policy and practice vary in the different parts of the test. Examiners have training and written instructions on how to respond to repair initiations by candidates. The examiner rarely initiates repair. Candidates initiate repair in relation to examiner questions in a variety of ways. In response to a candidate's repair initiation, examiner instructions are to repeat the test question once only but not to paraphrase or alter the question. The vast majority of examiners follow the instructions, but there are exceptions. The organisation of repair in the Speaking Test is highly constrained and inflexible; it is rationally designed in relation to the institutional attempt to standardise the interaction and thus to assure reliability. This results in a much narrower choice of repair options.

In general, then, the organisation of repair in the IELTS Speaking Test differs very significantly from that described as operating in ordinary conversation (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977), L2 classroom interaction (Seedhouse, 2004) and from university interaction, (Benwell, 1996; Benwell & Stokoe, 2002; Stokoe 2000), the latter being the target form of interaction for most candidates. In the data, the organisation of repair in the IELTS Speaking Test overwhelmingly follows the instructions for IELTS examiners in Part 1, which specify that the question can only be repeated once and may not be explained or reformulated.

*What role does repetition play?*

In Part 1, examiners are instructed to repeat the question once and then move on. In the vast majority of cases, examiners adhere to this policy. Occasionally, however, some examiners do not follow these instructions; subsequently, the consequences of repeated repetition vary.

*What is the organisation of turn-taking and sequence?*

The overall organisation of turn-taking and sequence in the Speaking Test closely follows the examiner instructions. Part 1 is a succession of question-answer adjacency pairs. Part 2 is a long turn by the student, started off by a prompt from the examiner and sometimes rounded off with questions. Part 3 is another succession of question-answer adjacency pairs. This tight organisation of turn-taking and sequence is achieved in two ways. Firstly, the examiner script specifies this organisation, eg "Now, in this first part, I'd like to ask you some questions about yourself." (Examiner script, January 2003). Secondly, many candidates have undertaken training for the Test, and in some cases this will have included a mock Speaking Test.

*What is the relationship between Speaking Test interaction and other speech exchange systems such as ordinary conversation, L2 classroom interaction and interaction in universities?*

Speaking test interaction is a very clear example of goal-oriented institutional interaction and is very different to ordinary conversation; it should be noted here that the IELTS test developers' primary aim was not to develop a Speaking Test in which the interaction mirrors ordinary conversation. Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974) speak of a "linear array" of speech-exchange systems. Ordinary conversation is one polar type and involves total local management of turn-taking. At the other extreme (which they exemplify by debate and ceremony) there is pre-allocation of all turns. Clearly, Speaking Test interaction demonstrates an extremely high degree of pre-allocation of turns by comparison with other institutional contexts (cf Drew & Heritage, 1992). Not only are the pre-allocated turns given in the format of prompts, but the examiner also reads out scripted prompts (with some flexibility allowed in Part 3). So, not only the type of turn but the precise linguistic formatting of the examiner's turn is pre-allocated for the majority of the test.



The repair mechanism is pre-specified in the examiner instructions; the organisation of turn-taking and sequence are implicit in these. There are also constraints on the extent to which topic can be developed. The interaction also exhibits considerable asymmetry. Only the examiner has the right to ask questions and allocate turns; the candidate has the right to initiate repair, but only in the prescribed format. Access to knowledge is also highly asymmetrical. The examiner knows in advance what the questions are, but the candidate may not know this. The examiner has to evaluate the candidate's performance and allocate a score, but must not inform the candidate of his/her evaluation. Overall, the examiner performs a gate-keeping role in relation to the candidate's performance. Restrictions and regulations are institutionally implemented with the intention to maximise fairness and comparability.

There are certain similarities with L2 classroom interaction, in that the tasks in all three parts of the test are ones which could potentially be employed in L2 classrooms. Indeed, task-based assessment and task-based teaching have the potential to be very closely related (Ellis, 2003). There are sequences which occur in some L2 classrooms, for example when teachers have to read out prepared prompts and learners have to produce responses. However, there are many interactional characteristics in the Speaking Test which are very different to L2 classroom interaction. In general, tasks tend to be used in L2 classrooms for learner-learner interaction in pairs or groups, with the teacher acting as a facilitator, rather than for teacher-learner interaction. Another difference between Speaking Test interaction and L2 classroom interaction is that the teacher evaluation moves common in L2 classrooms are generally absent in the Speaking Test. Also, the options for examiners to conduct repair, explain vocabulary, help struggling students or engage with learner topics are very restricted by comparison to those used by teachers in L2 classroom interaction (Seedhouse, 2004).

As far as university contexts (Benwell, 1996; Benwell & Stokoe, 2002; Stokoe 2000) are concerned, interaction in seminars, workshops and tutorials appears to be considerably less restricted and more unpredictable than that in the Speaking Test. Seminars, tutorials and workshops are intended to allow the exploration of subject matter, topics and ideas and to encourage self-expression. In the Speaking Test, intersubjectivity does not need to be achieved and language is produced for the purpose of assessment. However, there are some similarities. It is very likely that students will be asked questions about their home countries or towns and about their interests when they start tutorials in their universities.

To summarise, Speaking Test interaction is an institutional variety of interaction with three sub-varieties, namely the three parts of the Test. It is very different to ordinary conversation, has some similarities with some sub-varieties of L2 classroom interaction and some similarities with interaction in universities. Speaking test interaction has some unique interactional features; these may, however, occur in other language proficiency interviews.

*What is the relationship between examiner interaction and candidate performance?*

The overall impression is that the overwhelming majority of examiners treat candidates fairly and equally. Where there are exceptions to this, some examiners sometimes do not follow instructions and may give an advantage to some candidates. The overall impression in the data is that there does appear to be some kind of correlation between test score and occurrence of other-initiated repair, ie trouble in hearing or understanding on the part of the candidate. In interviews with high test scores, candidates initiate fewer or no repairs on the talk of the examiner.

*To what extent do examiners follow the briefs they have been given?*

The vast majority of examiners follow the briefs and instructions very closely.

*In cases where examiners diverge from briefs, what impact does this have on the interaction?*

Where some examiners sometimes do not follow instructions, they often give an advantage to some candidates in terms of their ability to produce an answer. Some examples of examiners aiding candidates in this way are provided above.

*How are tasks implemented? What is the relationship between the intended tasks and the implemented tasks, between the task-as-workplan and task-in-process?*

There is an extremely close correspondence between intended and implemented tasks. This is in contrast to the common finding in language teaching that there is often a major difference between task-as-workplan and task-in-process (Seedhouse, 2005). One key difference, however, is that L2 classroom tasks generally involve learner-learner interaction.

*How is the organisation of the interaction related to the institutional goal and participants' orientations?*

The organisation of turn-taking, sequence and repair are logically organised in relation to the institutional goal of ensuring valid and reliable assessment of English speaking proficiency, with standardisation being the key concept in relation to the instructions for examiners. CA work was influential in the design of the revised IELTS Speaking Test, introduced in 2001, and specifically in the standardisation of examiner talk: "Lazaraton's studies have made use of conversation analytic techniques to highlight the problems of variation in examiner talk across different candidates and the extent to which this can affect the opportunity candidates are given to perform, the language sample they produce and the score they receive. The results of these studies have confirmed the value of using a highly specified interlocutor frame in Speaking Tests which acts as a guide to assessors and provides candidates with the same amount of input and support." (Taylor, 2000, pp8-9).

*How are the roles of examiner and examinee, the participation framework and the focus of the interaction established?*

These are established in the introduction section to the test. The examiner has a script to follow, which includes verifying the candidate's identity, performing introductions and stating the participation framework and focus of the interaction. Once established, the participation framework is sustained throughout the interview and oriented to by both interactants. The examiner is also the one who closes the encounter.

*How long do tests last in practice and how much time is given for preparation in Part 2?*

The documentation states that tests will last between 11 and 14 minutes. In the sample data, the shortest test lasted 12 minutes 16 seconds (0176) and the longest test 17 minutes 1 second (0199). This included the approximate 1 minute preparation time for the long turn. The actual length of long turn preparation time varied from 41.1 seconds (0678) to 98.2 seconds (0505).

## **5 CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Implications and recommendations: test design and examiner training**

In this final section, we conclude with implications and recommendations in relation to test design and examiner training, followed by suggestions for further research.

We employed Richards and Seedhouse's (2005) model of "description leading to informed action" in relation to applications of CA. Here we summarise the recommendations for test design and examiner training which have emerged from analysis of the data. The logic of the Speaking Test is to ensure validity by standardisation of examiner talk. Therefore, most of these recommendations serve

to increase standardisation of examiner conduct and concomitantly equality of opportunity for candidates. Other suggestions aim to make the interview more similar to everyday conversation where appropriate.

We would recommend that a statement on repair rules be included in documentation for students, eg “When you don’t understand a question, you may ask the examiner to repeat it. The examiner will repeat this question only once. No explanations or rephrasing of questions will be provided.” Examiners might also state these rules during the opening sequence. It may also be helpful for candidates to know that examiners will not express any evaluations of their utterances.

We recommend, in the interests of consistency and standardisation, that examiner instructions should be that “okay” is used in the receipt slot to mark transition to the next question and that “mm hm” be used for back-channelling, particularly in Part 2.

A sequence of questions on a particular topic may appear unproblematic in advance of implementation. However, this may nonetheless be a cause of unforeseen trouble for candidates, especially if an unmotivated and unprepared shift in perspective of any kind is involved. Piloting of questions (if not already undertaken) to check for this is therefore recommended.

There is a case for training examiners in how to adapt the rounding-off questions slightly to fit seamlessly into the previous flow of the interaction. The training could include some of the examples given above, explain the topic disjunction problems which can arise with unmodified rounding-off questions and provide examples of questions which have been successfully adapted to topic flow. Training should also stress that the questions are optional and that in some instances it might not be possible at all to adapt them to the flow of the interaction.

Although the vast majority of examiners follow instructions, some do not, as we have seen above. Examiner training could include examples from the data of examiners failing to follow instructions re repair, repetition, explaining vocabulary, assisting candidates and evaluation. These examples would demonstrate how such failures may compromise test validity.

The question “What shall I call you?” created significant problems, and it is recommended that this question be deleted. The issue of how candidates and examiners address each other is a cultural one and may be adapted to the local conventions.

We recommend that the IELTS test developers consider what kind of variation in test and preparation duration is acceptable, since candidates may in some cases derive benefit from disproportionate preparation time. “*Examiners must stick to the correct timing of the test both for standardisation and fairness to candidates and also for the efficient running of tests in centres.*” (IELTS Examiner Training Material 2001, pp6)

## 5.2 Suggestions for further research

This study has not correlated candidate categories in the database (gender, test centre, test score) systematically with patterns of interaction. For the test developers it may be helpful to establish if particular patterns of communication and evidence of interactional trouble are related to any of the above categories. For example, it may be found that candidates from particular regions of the world repeatedly run into trouble in relation to a particular interactional sequence, topic or question in the Speaking Test. Or, for example, comparisons of interactional patterns associated with candidates with a low score with those with a high score may be revealing. Furthermore, such research could build on existing IELTS research like O’ Loughlin’s (2000) study of the variable of gender in relation to the oral interview. Relationships between these categories and patterns of communication may form the basis of further research studies.

We tentatively suggest that there appears to be a correlation between test score and incidence of interactional trouble and repair sequences. This could be researched further. Current repair policy is that only verbatim repetitions of the question are allowed in Part 1. Further research could examine the consequences of allowing the examiner a greater variety of repair activities.

The Speaking Test is predominantly used to assess and predict whether a candidate has the ability to communicate effectively on programmes in English-speaking universities. A vital area of research is therefore the relationship between the IELTS Speaking Test as a variety of institutional discourse and the varieties to which candidates will be exposed when they commence their university studies.

Our study has shown the interactional organisation of the Speaking Test to have certain idiosyncrasies, particularly in the organisation of repair. These idiosyncrasies derive rationally from the principle of ensuring standardisation. The key question arising from this study is how the organisation of interaction in the Speaking Test might be modified to make it more similar to interaction in the university environment while not compromising the principle of standardisation.

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## APPENDIX 1: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

A full discussion of CA transcription notation is available in Atkinson and Heritage (1984). Punctuation marks are used to capture characteristics of speech delivery, **not** to mark grammatical units.

[	indicates the point of overlap onset
]	indicates the point of overlap termination
=	a) turn continues below, at the next identical symbol b) if inserted at the end of one speaker's turn and at the beginning of the next speaker's adjacent turn, it indicates that there is no gap at all between the two turns
(3.2)	an interval between utterances (3 seconds and 2 tenths in this case)
(.)	a very short untimed pause
<u>Word</u>	underlining indicates speaker emphasis
e:r the:::	indicates lengthening of the preceding sound
-	a single dash indicates an abrupt cut-off
?	rising intonation, not necessarily a question
!	an animated or emphatic tone
,	a comma indicates low-rising intonation, suggesting continuation
.	a full stop (period) indicates falling (final) intonation
CAPITALS	especially loud sounds relative to surrounding talk
◦ ◦	utterances between degree signs are noticeably quieter than surrounding talk
↑ ↓	indicate marked shifts into higher or lower pitch in the utterance following the arrow
> <	indicate that the talk they surround is produced more quickly than neighbouring talk
( )	a stretch of unclear or unintelligible speech
((inaudible 3.2))	a timed stretch of unintelligible speech
(guess)	indicates transcriber doubt about a word
.hh	speaker in-breath
hh	speaker out-breath
hhHA HA heh heh	laughter transcribed as it sounds
→	arrows in the left margin pick out features of especial interest

### Additional symbols

<i>ja</i> ((tr: yes))	non-English words are italicised, and are followed by an English translation in double brackets.
[gibee]	in the case of inaccurate pronunciation of an English word, an approximation of the sound is given in square brackets
[æ ]	phonetic transcriptions of sounds are given in square brackets
< >	indicate that the talk they surround is produced slowly and deliberately (typical of teachers modelling forms)
C:	Candidate
E:	Examiner

## APPENDIX 2: A LOW SCORE OF BAND 3.0 ON THE IELTS SPEAKING MODULE

## Part 1

- 6 E: ehm (.) this is the speaking module, for the international English  
-5 language testing system, .h conducted on the twenty eighth of  
-4 january, ehm two thousand an three,? .h thee ca:ndidate is  
-3 ((first name,)) ((last name,)) candidate number ((number))=  
-2 ((number))=((number))=((number.)) .hh a:nd the interviewer is  
-1 ((first name))= ((last name:.))  
0 (1.0)/((clicking sound probably from tape being switched on and off))  
1 E: .hh well good evening=my name is ((first name)) ((last name))=  
2 can you tell me your full name please.=  
3 C: =yes ((first name,)) ((last name.))  
4 E: .hh ah: a:n[d,  
4b C: [ghm=  
4c E: =can you tell me er, what shall I ca:ll you.  
4d (1.5)  
5 → C: e:r (1.0) can you repeat the: er the question[(s),?  
6 E: [( ) what do you, (0.2)  
7 E: your first name? do you use [(last name))  
7b C: [( ) ((first name))  
8 E: ((first name)). [(first name)) (you want me to call you) ((first na[me))  
8b C: [yes ((first name)) [yes  
9 E: °right.° ((with forced sound release))  
10 E: .hh and can I see your identifi<cation: card please.>  
10b (0.5)  
10c → C: .h[hm-  
11 E: [an ID. .hh er: not a student card=do you have an I [D °card? °  
12 C: [↑e:::m  
13 C: no::=in, (0.2) tch! no.  
13b (0.5)  
13c C: tch! er I don't er (0.2) .h I don't have (1.3) the: (1.0)  
13d administration,=er: the day.  
14 E: m:: I understa:nd but you erm .h need to ha:ve, a: tch! (0.2) your official,  
15 C: yes  
16 E: ID card.  
17 C: ye:s.  
17b (1.5)  
18 E: .hh thank yer .hh erm in this first part↓ I'd like to s=ask some questions  
19 about your↑self. .hh em >well first of all can you tell me where you're<  
19b fro↑m↓  
20 C: .h yes er: hh I go: eh: hh e:r I live er to:, .h to Kosani,?  
20b (0.2)  
21 E: [°(I'm) from Kosani.  
22 C: [I am from Kosani.  
23 E: o↑okay↓ tch! now! .hh uhm ↑can we talk about erm where you live.  
((Note: While we did the final check on the transcription, the tape got damaged at this stretch.))  
23b (0.5)  
24 could you describe the city or the town that you live in ↑↑now↓.  
25 C: .h er yes I'd li- I would like eh .hh I (0.3) eh I very much eh in  
25b Thesaloniki,? (0.5)  
26 E: you live in <The[saloniki> eh=ok .hh could you describe where you ↑live?  
27 C: [yes.  
29 C: er yes er (0.5) I would like er (0.2)  
30 E: whe:re you live. >can you describe it please.< ((pitch lowered gradually))  
31 C: erm (1.2)  
32 E: >where do you live in Thesaloniki:. < ((pitch lowered more))  
32b (0.2)  
32c E: where?  
33 C: erm: tch! in the centre.  
33b (0.2)  
34 E: tell me: eh describe where you live.=uh hum,?



- 34b (1.0)
- 35 C: erm (1.0) I would live in erm the centre, (.) erm, (0.5) I'm er:, h (0.4)
- 36 one years er, (.) one years in Thesaloniki,
- 37 E: I see .hh what do you li:ke:, about living he:re
- 38 C: tch! erm (3.0)
- 38b E: °°°( ) °°°
- 39 C: I would like Thesaloniki:, (0.4) er because erm (2.0) because it have eh
- 39b it has eh (.) er very much er eh people, (0.5) and: eh: and clu:bbing,
- 39c and er [(1.0)
- ?? [(sound of paper shuffling)]
- 40 E: m ↑hm .h eh is, are there things you don't like about it?
- 40b (.)
- 40c E: ((first name))
- 41→ C: wh:at?
- 42 E: <are there things you don't like about it?>
- 43 C: yes.
- 43b (0.5)
- 43c C: er (1.8) er I guess I I do:: (0.5) I do like er: Thesaloniki,?
- 44 E: <uh h↑um .hh how could you improve (.) the city? >
- 44b (0.5)
- 45 C: hm: (2.5) I improving Thesaloniki: (3.0) umhh (1.0)
- 46 E: tch! all right. lets move on to (.) the topic of food and restaurants=
- 47 what kind of food do you like to eat.
- 48 C: er: (0.8) I'(wou) like er: (0.8) own food in the restaurant, because er (.)
- 48b eh
- 49 E: what kind of food do you like to eat.
- 50 C: er (2.0) tch! erm (.) yes er: I would like eh to eata the restaurant, (0.3)
- 50b and er:, (0.5)
- 51 E: .hh <<is there any food you don't like?>> ((flat intonation))
- 51b (0.5)
- 52 C: er: (0.8) no there isn't er a (.) a restaurant er (0.6) erm (3.0)
- 53 E: m ↑hm (.) um (0.3) <what are some of the advantages and disadvantages
- 54 of eating in a restaurant.>
- 54b (0.5)
- 55 C: erm (5.0) tch! er the advantage er (0.2) eh of eating er in a restaurant,?
- 56 (0.4) er because: er : (0.7)
- 57 E: uh hm (0.5)
- 57b C: uhmhh
- 57c (0.8)
- 58 E: what's the good thing about eating in a restaurant. ((soft voice))
- 58b (5.0)
- 59 E: ↑n:t. ^lets talk about fi:lm:s. (.) do you enjoy wa:tching films?=  
=((first name))?
- 59b er yes. eh I'm like er: (.) er watching film,?
- 59c E: °eh hm,? °
- 60 C: er: because eh: (.) erm (.) because watching er to=er=in Thesaloniki,
- 60b and er, and (0.2) and er, like in Thesaloniki:
- 61 E: okay .h how often <do you watch (.) films.>
- 61b (0.5)
- 62 C: umhh (0.2)
- 63 E: °how often° ((whisper voice))
- 64 C: °how often° (0.2) .hh erm (6.0) I often er (2.0) I often watch er (.)
- 65 er film, in er (6.0)
- 66 E: ((sing song voice all turn)) °uh hum all right° (0.5)
- 66b now lets move on to the next part (1.0) a:nd I::, I am going to give
- 67 you a topic, (0.2) and I'd like you to talk about it for one or two
- 68 minutes (.) before you talk you will have one minute to think:
- 69 about what you are going to say: .hh and you can make some notes
- 69b if you wish.
- 70 (.)
- 70b E: °all right?=do you understand? ° ((high pitch))
- 71 C: yes.
- 72 E: okay so here's some paper, and here's a pencil, (.) eh to

73 make your notes, (0.5) and er here's your ↑↑topic: (0.5)  
 74 here we are (.) I'd like you to describe a trip: (.) that you once went on:  
 74b ((sound of tape recording being switched off))

**Part 2** (Counter 119)

75 E: a:ll right now remember you have >one or two minutes for this so don't  
 76 worry if I stop you .h and I'll tell you when the time is up,<  
 77 can you start speaking (ngw) please,?=

78 C: =yes (0.2) .hh er I travelled in er (0.5) I travelled in er inyana,  
 78b .hh iryana is very:, (.) very like,  
 79 and er (.) I went (.) and I went er to: (0.8) I went there for er the job, (.)  
 ((Note: While we did the final check on the transcription, the tape got damaged at this stretch))

80 and er (3.0) and er (5.0)  
 81 E: did you enjoy your trip? or not? how did you go there? you went to  
 82 Indiana.=  
 83 C: =yes.=  
 84 E: =how did you travel there?  
 84b (6.0)  
 84c E: did you go by train?=did you go by plane?=how [did you  
 85 C: [er,  
 86 C: I went er tch! (.) to: the bus (0.2) and erm (.) I: went erm to my  
 86b parents, (0.2) em (0.2)  
 86c E: °°mhm°° did you enjoy the trip?  
 86d (0.2)  
 87 E: ((first name?))  
 88 (3.0)  
 88b C: er yes I:: (2.0) I enjoy the: (5.0)

**Part 3** (Counter 143)

89 E: °°uh hum°° .h okay: .hh ↑can I have the task (.) card (.) back=then:  
 89b °°uh hum° (.) wha:t did you like (.) mo:s[t  
 90 C: [grh ((clears throat))  
 90b E: about it.  
 90c (0.7)  
 91 E: what was the be:st: thing:.  
 91b (1.0)  
 92 C: um (3.0)  
 93 E: °m:h:: °  
 93b (0.3)  
 93c E: tch! o:kay (0.5) .hh ^erm^ (0.8) tch! we've been talking about a trip  
 93d that you went on=and I'd like to discuss with you: one or  
 94 two ↑more ↑↑general questions related to this.=  
 95 =.hhh ↑lets think about erm (.) travel and transport  
 96 .hhh ↑whats the most popular way to travel .hh a long distance: (.)  
 97 <in your country?>  
 97b (0.7)  
 98 C: um: (5.0) er the travel ermh, (3.0) .hh er I would like er to:: (0.5)  
 99 to transport er (1.0) tch! (1.0) [eh for the: (6.0)  
 99b E: [°mhm°  
 100 E: °°uh hum° .hhh how do you think, we're going to travel in the future? .hh  
 hh  
 100b (0.2)  
 101 C: erm: yes erm: (0.2) I believe that er: (0.5) er the travel er in the future,  
 102 E: °mhm,? °  
 103 C: er but er: but I don't er (1.0) erm (0.8) but I don't eh know: to: .hh to  
 104 the to:wn:, the [city:.  
 103 E: [a:ll right:: (.) o:kay:: .hh thank ((tape cut off here))  
 (0836)

## APPENDIX 3: A HIGH SCORE OF BAND 9.0 ON THE IELTS SPEAKING MODULE

## Part 1

- 1 E: good afternoon (1.3) uh:m (3.4) can you tell me your full name please?  
2 (0.4)
- 3 C: °((name omitted))° (0.2)
- 4 E: thanks and uh:: (1.5) can you tell me where you're from? (0.3)
- 5 C: °I'm from Trinidad ((inaudible))° (0.3)
- 6 E: okay (0.4) can I see your I.D please (4.7) thanks (3.3) that's fine thank  
7 you (1.7) now in this first part I'd like to ask you some questions about  
8 yourself (0.6) uh:: let's talk about (0.4) uh:m (3.1) what you do: (0.3) do  
9 you work or are you a student (0.3)
- 10 C: I'm medical student hh (0.2) I'm ((inaudible)) graduate in Ma:y of this  
11 year (.) s(hh)o (0.3)
- 12 E: o[kay]
- 13 C: [not]too long (0.5)
- 14 E: okay (0.7) so: uh (1.1) tell me about your studies (1.0)
- 15 C: well (.) I originally started in Grenada (0.3) we do: two years of basic  
16 sciences (.) anatomy physiology etc (0.4) ·hh then we do two years of  
17 clinical studies either in England or the States or a combination of both  
18 (0.5)also <the students are American so they tend to do most of the  
19 studies in the States< (0.7) uh::m I chose I originally: (.) scheduled to  
20 start in New York but that didn't work out so I actually came to England  
21 (0.4) but I'm actually glad I did because (.) medical system is a lot dif- it  
22 it American system is much different in((inaudible)) (0.5) whereas  
23 English system is more compatible so: I: consider it's a good move to  
24 come to Engla(hh)nd (0.3)
- 25 E: okay so what do you like most (0.3) about your studies (1.7)
- 26 C: uh the variety (0.4) I think in: medicine especially because no: two  
27 patients will present the same way (0.4) and i- it's always a challenge to  
28 think about what the diagnosis is (0.3) and uh ways in which you can (.)  
29 confirm the diagnosis °basically° (0.2)
- 30 E: okay (0.4) are there any things you ↑don't like about your studies? (2.7)
- 31 C: well personally the fact tha:t (.) if I read something I have to read it again  
32 you know to remember it (.) it's just a lot (.) the volume of work is very  
33 very large so it's just (0.2) time management (0.2) and learning to deal  
34 with the: (0.2) °(volume of work)° (0.3)
- 35 E: okay (0.7) so uh:: what qualifications or certificates (0.8) do you hope to  
36 get (1.3)
- 37 C: well (1.1) after I: (0.5) get my degree in May I'm hoping to:: (1.3) uh:m  
38 >probably work in England for a while and in order to do that I have to  
39 do further exams< hh (0.5) unfortunately bu:t uh:m (1.1) ·hh then I just  
40 hope to: (0.6) progress further i- in my field ((inaudible)) (0.2)
- 41 E: okay okay (0.7) ↑let's uh move on to talk about some of the activities  
42 you (0.6) enjoy in your free time (0.7) when do you have free time? (1.3)
- 43 C: rarely hh heh (0.3) ·hh uh::m (0.5) I try to pace myself generally (.) in  
44 terms of: getting a lot of work done during the week so I ca:n at least  
45 relax a bit at the weekends (0.5) I like to:: look at movies go shopping:  
46 hh heh (0.5) uhm have a chat with friends and (0.6)
- 47 E: okay and uh::m (1.5) what free time activities are most popular where  
48 you live? (1.6)
- 49 C: probably going to the beach definitely 'cause it's always warm hh (.)
- 50 E: mm [hm]
- 51 C: [th jat's what I miss most actually (0.4) uh::m (2.3) I would say  
52 that's probably the most po[pular]
- 53 E: [ o:]kay (0.4) so how important is free time  
54 in people's lives? (0.6)
- 55 C: very ve(hh)ry important (0.7) ·hh I can (1.8) well personally uh:m (0.7)  
56 because I always have so much work to do so much studying to do it's  
57 always so important for me (.) to be able to relax a bit and then come  
58 back refreshed so I can study (.) some more ((inaudible)) (0.2) °I think

- 59 it's very very important to have free time° (0.3)  
 60 E: okay okay (0.7) uh::m (0.8) okay can we talk about (.) your childhood  
 61 are you happy to do that? (0.3)  
 62 C: yes? °(no worries)°=  
 63 E: =okay (0.3) so where did you grow up (0.3)  
 64 C: I grew up in Tobago (0.2)  
 65 E: o:kay (0.5) uh was it a good place for children? (0.4)  
 66 C: yes I think so hh HA (.)  
 67 E: why? (0.2)  
 68 C: uh::m (1.7) I think becau:se the society at ho:me (.) tends to stress a lot  
 69 of family value (.) >I think that's very very important and looking back  
 70 at my childhood now I realise just how important that was< (0.8) ·hh  
 71 uh::m (0.6)·hh I can't say I can't really compare myself to to:: (1.1)  
 72 children growing up in other parts of the world just because I didn't  
 73 experience it first hand (.)but I would definitely advocate (0.2) growing  
 74 up in the West Indies (.) a (great dea(hh)l) (0.4)  
 75 E: where did you usually play? (0.7)  
 76 C: uh::m (1.7) well if you were at school then you would play at the (.)  
 77 playground at school o:r (0.7) at home there's always space to run  
 78 around the yard and things like that (.) or you could play on the beach:  
 79 (0.3)  
 80 E: oh okay okay (0.6) ·hh uh do you think childhood is different today (.)  
 81 from when you were a child? (2.2)  
 82 C: I think there's uh: uhm many differences yes because (1.6) uh:m (0.4)  
 83 children nowadays are exposed a lot mo:re (0.8) uh:m (1.5) different  
 84 influences basically because of the television internet things like that  
 85 (0.5) so I think that tends to have a bigger impact on a child (0.7) in  
 86 recent years compared to when I grew up (0.6)

## Part 2

- 87 E: okay (0.2) all right (cough) (4.3) okay now I'm gonna give you a topic  
 88 (.) and I'd like you to talk about it (0.6) for one to two minutes and  
 89 before you talk (0.3) you'll have one minute to think about what you're  
 90 gonna say (0.8) and you can make some notes if you wish (0.3) d'you  
 91 understand? (0.2)  
 92 C: yes (0.3)  
 93 E: o:kay (0.4) so here's paper (.) and pencil (0.8) for making some notes  
 94 (0.6) an:d (0.7) I'd like you to describe a trip (0.6) that you once went on  
 95 (33.8) okay? (0.2)  
 96 C: yep (.)  
 97 E: a:ll right (0.6) remember you have one to two minutes for this so don't  
 98 worry if I stop you I'll tell you when the time is u[p]  
 99 C: [o]kay (0.2)  
 100 E: can you start speaking now please=  
 101 C: =yeah (0.6) I remembe:r at the beginning of my medical school career  
 102 (0.4) we were taken on uhm a boat trip to one of the smaller islands  
 103 around Grenada (0.6) ·hh it was basically: a (0.5) ((inaudible)) trip (0.4)  
 104 ·hh uh:m it was part of the orientatio:n (0.4) into: medical school life and  
 105 into: life in Grenada: obviously (0.4) ·hh uh::m (1.1) uh I: think it took  
 106 abou:t half an hour to get the:re (0.3) if I remember correctly hh (.) uh:m  
 107 (0.5) there were lots of us there lots of the students (0.2) uh::m both (0.5)  
 108 >students who were just starting medical school as well as those who  
 109 were further into their medical school career< (0.7) an:d there was uhm  
 110 lot of ↑foo:d lots of drinks (.) we spent (.) most of the day on the beach)  
 111 (.) in the sun in the water (0.6·hh uh::m (1.5) it was: (.) but I can't say it  
 112 was: (0.3) a big (0.8) culture change for me because coming from  
 113 Tobago which is half an hour flying is (.) very very similar (0.3) but I  
 114 just enjoyed the day out and (0.7) ·hh uh:m it always brings back good  
 115 memories because then you remember all the free time that you had (.)  
 116 hh heh (0.5) uh::m (1.4) I actually: (0.3) repeated the trip about: a year  
 117 later (.) because that was my (0.4) last opportunity: (0.6) to uhm (0.2) see  
 118 a bit of Grenada before leaving: (0.3) to start my °((inaudible))° (0.7)

- 119           uh::m (1.9)  
 120    E:       okay (0.2) okay=  
 121    C:       =hh heh (.)  
 122    E:       do you generally enjoy travelling? (0.5)  
 123    C:       yes I do although I haven't actually travelled as much as I would like to  
 124           yet (0.3) but hopefully after I start working (0.3)

**Part 3**

- 125    E:       o:kay okay (0.4) so we've been talking about a trip you (0.4) went on  
 126           (0.3)  
 127    C:       °y[eah]°  
 128    E:       [an ]d I'd like to discuss with you one or two more general questions  
 129           related to this (0.7) let's consider first of all uhm (.) public and private  
 130           transport can you describe (0.6) the public transport systems (0.3) in your  
 131           country (1.4)  
 132    C:       well there are public buses (0.4) which tend to be cheaper than taxis (0.2)  
 133           there is (0.6) uh:m a: taxi association which operates: basically from the  
 134           airport to anywhere around the island (0.3) but in general if you (.) need  
 135           a taxi >basically you just stand up on the side of the road and put out  
 136           your hand< hh heh (0.2) for uhm (0.3) a taxi that comes along (0.5) ·hh  
 137           uh::m (1.1) the bus system there's a central depot in the middle of town  
 138           (0.2) so you can go there to purchase tickets and so (0.5) and there are  
 139           various othe:r (0.7) stations around the island where you can also  
 140           purchase tickets (0.4)  
 141    E:       °okay (0.2) okay° (0.6) uh:m (0.5) can you uh:: (1.4) speculate on (1.6)  
 142           future developments (.) in transport systems? (3.8)  
 143    C:       currently there a:re talks to:: (.) expand (0.2) the public >transport  
 144           systems to< inclu:de (0.5) what we call maxi taxis not (0.6) ·hh uh::m  
 145           (0.7) not exactly public buses they tend to be smalle:r (0.4) they tend to  
 146           charge more than the public buses (0.4) but uh >they can also hold more  
 147           people than a taxi obviously so it's it's more economical in that way<  
 148           (0.6) ·hh uh:m (0.8) I'm not sure when exactly it will the whole system be  
 149           put into place but (.)actually (0.7) the: (0.7) the:: (0.4) the plans for the:  
 150           development of the system in Tobago: (.) can be modelled on  
 151           ((inaudible)) in Trinidad because there are a lot more maxi taxis in  
 152           Trinidad (0.2) °((inaudible))° (.)  
 153    E:       okay okay (0.5) can you uh ((cough)) (1.1) speculate on an- any measures  
 154           that will be taken to reduce pollution (0.7) in the future? (2.0)  
 155    C:       there's a lot of debate no:w about pollution especially the waters (0.3)  
 156           around Trinidad and Tobago (0.2) becau:se there's (0.5) gro- growth in  
 157           the tourism industry especially (0.5) there's a lot of concern about the  
 158           hotels (.)·hh disposing of their waste properly (0.5) and in recent years in  
 159           the (0.2) probably about the last ten years or so there have been (0.7)  
 160           uh::m (0.4)there has been an increase in the amount of pollutio:n (0.3) in  
 161           the water and the:re's (0.6) several (1.3) uh:m societies for example  
 162           ((inaudible)) Tobago that have been set up to try and combat the  
 163           problems throu:gh education (0.2) uh:m (1.1) uh:m (0.3) there is other  
 164           mea(hh)sures ((inaudible)) (.)  
 165    E:       okay okay (.) okay (0.6) ↑right thank you very much=  
 166    C:       =yes (.)  
 167    E:       that's the end of the speaking test=  
 168    C:       =okay thank you

(0389)