Topic development in the IELTS Speaking Test

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This study investigates topic development in the Speaking Test, applying a Conversation Analysis (CA) institutional discourse methodology to transcribed test audio-recordings. The recommendations include adding a short Part 4 to the Test, in which candidates lead a discussion and ask the examiner topic-related questions.

Click here to read the Introduction to this volume which includes an appraisal of this research, its context and impact.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated topic development in the Speaking Test, applying a Conversation Analysis (CA) institutional discourse methodology to a corpus of 60 transcribed test audio-recordings. Topic is presented as a vital construct in the Speaking Test, as inextricably entwined with the organisation of turn-taking, sequence and repair, and as directly related to the institutional goal of ensuring validity in the assessment of English speaking proficiency. In the data, management of topic is almost entirely pre-determined by the examiner’s script and how this script is interactionally implemented throughout each individual interview. There are asymmetrical rights to topic management between examiner and candidate. Examiners mark topic boundary markers in a variety of ways and employ a variety of next moves when candidates have produced a response to a question.

Topic is integrated into the organisation of the interaction in that there is an archetypal organisation which combines turn-taking, adjacency pair and topic, as follows. Examiner questions contain two components: a) an adjacency pair component, which requires the candidate to provide an answer; and b) a topic component, which requires the candidate to develop a specific topic. This organisation may be termed a ‘topic-based Q-A adjacency pair’. So in the Speaking Test, unlike in conversation, topic is always introduced by means of a question. To obtain a high score, candidates need to do the following: a) understand the question they have been asked; b) provide an answer to the question; c) identify the topic inherent in the question; and d) develop the topic inherent in the question.

The characteristics of high scoring and low scoring tests in relation to topic are detailed, with reference to: length of turn; topic trouble; engagement with the topic; coherence; use of lexical items and syntax; and projection of identity. Examiners may take a number of features of monologic topic development into account in Part 2. There is very little variation in the interactional style of examiners. Examiners rarely diverge from the brief in our corpus.

Recommendations are made in relation to the provision and use of follow-up questions, the importance of examiners following their briefs, and of explicit marking of topic shift. Although Part 3 is termed ‘two-way discussion’, it is almost identical to Part 1 interactionally, in that it consists of a series of topic-based question-answer adjacency pairs. There are hardly any opportunities for candidates to introduce or shift topic and they are generally closed down when they try to do so. The authors recommend adding a short Part 4, in which the examiner would not ask any questions at all. Rather, the candidate would lead a discussion and ask the examiner topic-related questions.
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1 RESEARCH DESIGN

1.1 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.

- **Part 1 (Introduction)**: candidates answer general questions about themselves, their homes/families, their jobs/studies, their interests, and a range of familiar topic areas. The examiner introduces him/herself and confirms the candidate’s identity. The examiner interviews the candidate using verbal questions selected from familiar topic frames. This part lasts between four and five minutes.

- **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.

- **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, p 11). “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, p 5). 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 p 5). 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; and analysing. Other speech functions may emerge during the Test, but they are not forced by the test structure.

Detailed performance descriptors have been developed which describe spoken performance at the nine IELTS bands, based on the criteria listed below (IELTS Handbook 2005, p 11). Scores were reported as whole bands in 2004, which is when the tests studied were recorded.

*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. For coherence, the key indicators 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.

Topic is employed in the IELTS Speaking Band descriptors to differentiate levels. In some cases it is mentioned under ‘Fluency and coherence’. It is used to differentiate Band 8 “develops topics coherently and appropriately” from Band 9 “develops topics fully and appropriately”. At lower levels it is mentioned under ‘Lexical resource’ and differentiates Band 3 “has insufficient vocabulary for less familiar topics” from Band 4 “is able to talk about familiar topics but can only convey basic meaning on unfamiliar topics”.

1.2 Research focus and significance
The overall aim is to reveal how topic is developed in the IELTS Speaking Test. The main research question is:

1) How is topic developed in the three parts of the Speaking Test?
In answering this question, it is considered how topic as an interactional organisation is related to the overall architecture of interaction in the Speaking Test.

Sub-questions are as follows:

2) How is topic developed by candidates with a high score, a mid-range score and a low score?
The emphasis in this research question will be on the micro-detail. What precisely do candidates do differently in relation to topic development at these different levels?

3) How does the examiner’s interactional style contribute to topic development?
The research literature has identified this as an area for investigation (Brown and Hill, 1998, p 15). This study provides a qualitative investigation of this question.

4) To what extent do examiners follow the briefs they have been given in relation to topic? In cases where they diverge from briefs, what impact does this have on the interaction?
A previous study (Seedhouse and Egbert, 2006) found that the vast majority of examiners follow the briefs and instructions very closely. However, 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. The 2006 study focused on turn-taking, sequence and repair and the current study will follow this up in relation to topic.

5) Do specific topics cause trouble for candidates? Do specific questions within a topic sequence cause trouble for candidates? If so, what is the nature of the trouble?
A previous study (Seedhouse and Egbert, 2006) found that a specific question “Would you like to be in a film?” caused trouble for a striking number of candidates. This area was, therefore, seen to warrant further investigation.
The ability to engage with, and develop, a topic nominated by the examiner is vital to a high Speaking Test score; this study provides the first detailed study of how candidates achieve or fail to achieve this.

1.3 Methodology

The methodology employed is Conversation Analysis (CA) (Drew and Heritage, 1992; Lazaraton, 2002; Seedhouse, 2004). Studies of institutional interaction have focused 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. 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. Although Sacks investigated topic very thoroughly in the 1960s and 1970s, CA interest in topic has waned over the last decades. Heritage (1997), for example, omits topic from his proposed six basic places to probe the institutionality of interaction, namely turn-taking, overall structural organisation, sequence organisation, turn design, lexical choice and asymmetry. The present study seeks to show how topic is foregrounded in this institutional setting and becomes one means of organising the talk.

This institutional discourse perspective was applied to the interactional organisation of the IELTS Speaking Test in Seedhouse and Egbert’s (2006) study – the overall finding being that “The organisation of turn-taking, sequence and repair are tightly and rationally organised in relation to the institutional goal of ensuring valid assessment of English speaking proficiency” (p 191). In this study, Richards and Seedhouse’s (2005) model of “description leading to informed action” is employed in relation to applications of CA. The study will link the description of the interaction (specifically, topic development) to the institutional goals and provide proposals for informed action based on analysis of the data.

1.4 Data information

Seedhouse visited UCLES in Cambridge in January 2009 and received the primary raw data, consisting of about 306 audio recordings in cassette format of IELTS Speaking Tests (the data from Hong Kong was on CD). The first stage of the project was to digitise all of the audio data. This was completed in February 2009 and the electronic data sent on DVDs to UCLES. There were 130 good quality recordings identified from the raw data which were originally taken from UCLES. Many cassettes were not useable due to poor sound quality or inadequate labelling. Sampling was carried out in conjunction with Fiona Barker at UCLES. The aim was to ensure that there was variety in the transcripts in terms of gender, region of the world, task/topic number and Speaking Test band score.

One research question asks: How is topic developed by candidates with a high score, a mid-range score and a low score? To achieve this, selection of specific recordings in relation to test scores was necessary. Overall test scores covered by the transcribed sample ranged from IELTS 9.0 to 4.0. Five tasks among the many used for the Test were selected for transcription. This enabled easy location of audio cassettes while at the same time ensuring diversity of task. The test centre countries covered by the data were: Albania, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cameroon, China, United Kingdom, Greece, Indonesia, India, Iran, Jamaica, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mozambique, Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Syria, Thailand, Vietnam and Zimbabwe. However, there was no information on nationality, L1s or ethnicity.

The next stage of the project was transcription to CA standards of the digitised audio data. Andrew Harris was engaged as Research Assistant on the project and is an experienced and expert CA transcriber. The researchers aimed to produce transcripts of the best quality and provide as much detail on interactional features as possible, even if that meant that the number of transcripts was reduced. This was because answering the research questions crucially depends on taking minute interactional detail into account. In Seedhouse’s previous (2006) IELTS project, the transcribers were not as experienced and, therefore, this was not possible. From the corpus of digitised data, the authors
prioritised transcription of those with high and low scores (Research Question 2) and unusual or interesting features (Research Questions 3, 4, 5). A total of 60 Speaking Tests were transcribed fully. The resultant transcripts have been produced in electronic format (Word) and are copyright of UCLES. All extracts in this report derive from this corpus.

The data set for this study was drawn from recordings made during 2004. Secondary data was also received of paper materials relevant to the Speaking Tests recorded on cassette, including examiners’ briefs, examiner induction, training, and instruction packs. These data are helpful in establishing the institutional goal of the interaction, the institutional orientations of the examiners and any specific issues in relation to topic. Research Question 4, in particular, requires matching of examiner briefs to their talk.

1.5 Literature review

This research project develops on the previous literature in three main areas. The first of these is the notion of topic as a focus of analysis. The second is the research into topic from a CA perspective. The third is the relative dearth of previous research into topic in relation to language proficiency interviews (LPIs) in general and the IELTS examination in particular.

The organisation of conversation into a series of topics seems to be omnipresent, to both participants and analysts. Topic has been described as a “metapragmatic folk term” (Grundy, 2000, p 192) illustrating the fact that it is a term that is used in a technical analytic sense but derives from a commonsense understanding of a pragmatic phenomenon. A commonsense understanding of topic is that it is a ‘subject’ or the ‘subjects’ of a conversation. Furthermore, that a number of topics make up the content of conversation. The idea with this kind of commonsense definition is that participants would define the topic as “what is being talked about at any given time”. However, this kind of definition can be problematic if adopted as the basis for an analytic perspective. One issue at stake is how to describe and define the given ‘topic’. If a conversation revolves around, for example ‘holidays’, this is clearly divisible by analysts into a wide range of possible ‘topics’. Furthermore, this type of analysis is likely to lead to a potentially infinite series of categories, which may or may not relate effectively to the participants’ notion of “what is being talked about”. However, the method of analysis employed in this study follows a very different approach, that of the CA approach to analysis of topic.

The difficulties in defining what constitutes a topic and its analyses are well recognised by research in many traditions (Levinson, 1983; Brown and Yule, 1983; Schegloff, 1990). Within the CA tradition, Atkinson and Heritage have stated, “topic may well prove to be among the most complex conversational phenomena to be investigated and, correspondingly, the most recalcitrant to systematic analysis” (1984, p 165).

The research into topic within the CA tradition has focused on how topic initialisations, shifts, and endings are managed as an interactional achievement in the unfolding of the moment-to-moment interaction, from the participants’ perspective. This is in direct opposition to the kind of analysis that attempts to categorise and delineate between topics from an analyst’s perspective. One reason for the importance of the participant perspective is illustrated by Sacks’ observation that “the way in which it’s a topic for them is different than the way it’s a topic for anybody else” (1992, p 75).

CA research has identified two distinct organisations for the management of topic (Sacks, 1992; Jefferson, 1984; Button and Cussey, 1984). The first of these, stepwise topic transitions occur where there is a ‘flow’ from one topic into another. “It’s a general feature for topic organisation in conversation that the best way to move from topic to topic is not by a topic close followed by a topic beginning, but by what we call a stepwise move. Such a move involves connecting what we’ve just been talking about to what we’re now talking about, though they are different” (Sacks, 1992, p 566).
The second are ‘disjunctive’ (Jefferson, 1984), ‘marked’ (Sacks, 1992, p 352) or boundaried topic shifts, where an explicit marker is used to indicate the shifting of topic; in these cases, they mark the end of one topic and the beginning of another. This is often employed when there is a larger ‘distance’ between the topics than in stepwise transitions. Within LPIs and the IELTS interviews in particular it can be seen that the vast majority of topic shifts are marked, which according to Sacks is problematic; he argues that ‘‘talking topically’ doesn’t consist of blocks of talk about a topic’’ (1992, p 762) and that the quality of a conversation can be, in part, measured by the “relative frequency of marked topic introductions [which] is a measure of a lousy conversation” (1992, p 352). Thus the reliance within the IELTS examination upon boundaried topic shifts may be problematic for the quality of the conversations generated, particularly as compared to those outside of this context, which the Test is attempting to assess.

Though this early work into topic within CA generated important insights into the interactional processes by which topics are managed, research interest in this area has fallen away almost completely, probably due to the aforementioned problems with topic as focus of analysis. It is surprising that the ‘institutional’ turn in CA work did not generate research interest into this aspect of conversation. Though recent work has suggested that topic research within institutional settings, particularly educational ones, may be easier than ordinary conversation, as the topics are often determined by the ‘educator’ (Stokoe, 2000).

Studies that have compared the interactional organisation of LPIs with ordinary conversation, (such as Lazaraton, 2002) have demonstrated that LPIs are a type of institutional interaction that share properties with interviews (Drew and Heritage, 1992) in the predetermination of interview actions and demonstrate interactional asymmetry (ibid). This asymmetry manifests the power difference in speaking rights between participants in the talk. This is particularly relevant to the interactional ‘rights’ between the examiner and the candidate in the IELTS Test with respect to topic. The examiner has almost exclusive rights on the determining of topics for conversation, furthermore these topics are pre-determined by the test design. Thus the candidate has little or no opportunity to introduce topics and demonstrate their abilities in this area, for assessment purposes.

While it is inevitable that topic plays a pivotal role in LPIs, particularly the questions of what topics are appropriate, how they are introduced, managed and by whom, there is a relative dearth of research that has directly considered topicality as a focus of analysis within these contexts. Kasper and Ross’s (2007) work into multiple questions in LPIs shows that it is common for interviewers to ask multiple questions on any one given topic, which holds true for the IELTS context. Lumley and O’Sullivan (2005) investigated the contribution of topic to task difficulty in relation to an OPI in Hong Kong; topics were investigated in relation to gender bias. Fulcher and Márquez Reiter (2003) also touch on the relationship between topic and task difficulty. A recent study (Gan et al, 2008) investigated topicality in peer group oral group assessment situations, and concluded that this kind of assessment allowed for the negotiation and management of topic by the participants, in ways that are closer to that of ordinary conversation. However, issues of test reliability and practicality, probably preclude this type of assessment as appropriate in the IELTS context. It is into this gap in the literature on topicality in LPIs that the current study sits, providing a systematic investigation into the management of topic in the IELTS Test.
2 DATA ANALYSIS

2.1 The characteristics of topic management in the Speaking Test

In this section, an overview is provided of the ways in which examiners manage topic in terms of marking a topic shift and how they follow up candidate responses. These are key points of variation in the Speaking Test.

2.2 How examiners mark a topic shift

There are a number of interactional resources drawn on by examiners to mark a new topic or a topic shift. Within Part 1 of the Test, these topic boundary markers (TBM) are pre-determined by the script, though examiners occasionally depart from the script. In Parts 2 and 3 of the Test, examiners are free to employ TBMs at their discretion, which leads to a wide variation in how topic boundaries are marked. There are three ways to mark a topic boundary in this corpus, namely unmarked topic boundary, generic marking and explicit marking of topic boundary.

2.2.1 Unmarked topic boundary

The first is the zero option of an unmarked topic boundary, where the examiner moves to the next topic by asking a direct question without any additional interactional work.

Extract 1

125 they progress to secondary school or or even university they they er (0.4) they still need to learn english
126 (0.5)
127 E: why did you choose to learn english and not another language
128 (0.6)
129 C: erm: (1.8) in hong kong i think commercially (0.3) erm english
130 is very useful (0.9) for business and also erm (0.3) in hong kong
(005756T130)

In line 128, the examiner simply asks the scripted question without any kind of additional interactional marking.

2.2.2 Generic marking of topic boundary

The second type of TBM is generic marking. Here the examiner marks the topic shift with generic, non-explicit additional markers, ie without an explicit statement that topic shift is occurring.

Extract 2

271 have only time to study at night (0.3) .hhh i’m still working
272 and this is my (0.8) the most important room in the whole house
273 hhhe .hhhh
274 (0.2)
275 E: → okay (. ) alright good thank you (0.7) .hhh so erm (0.4) d’you
276 spend alot? of time in this room?
277 ( .)
278 C: erm i have a erm classes from nine to four? an then i come home
279 (. ) usually do the dinner and check my hu- er son’s er homework
(000218T135)
In the above extract, the examiner’s utterance (line 275) begins with an acceptance of the candidate’s previous statement (okay). After a micro pause, this is followed with three markers of an upcoming topic change/shift (alright, good, thank you). This generic marking is followed by a pause and then “so erm”, here the “so” is also projecting an upcoming topic change/shift which follows after a further pause.

2.2.3 Explicit marking of topic boundary

Explicit topic boundary marking is the third way in which examiners mark or project an upcoming topic change/shift. Here, examiners make use of explicit markers of topic change. Within Part 1 of the Test, these are determined by the script (though examiners do sometimes stray from the script). In the rest of the Test, these are not scripted and the examiners are able to determine their own explicit TBMs. A scripted example from Part 1 follows:

Extract 3

128 (0.2)
129 E: m hm (0.3) okay. (.) .hhh let’s move on to:: talk about
130 ↑na::mes. (0.8) er:: >can you tell me what your< name means?
131 ((name omitted))
132 (1.2)
(00569800T132)

The examiner is following the written script for this topic proffer, employing the explicit TBM “let’s move on to talk about…”. It could be argued the examiner is adding an additional generic marker (okay) as a pre-sequence to the scripted explicit TBM. The next extract provides an example of an unscripted, explicit TBM.

Extract 4

385 C: [(cooks all the] (0.3) food and (0.5) [((inaudible))]
386 E: [ri::ght ] [((inaudible))]
387 (0.4)
388 E: okay .hhhh erm let’s look into the fu::tur::e. (.) what sort of
389 jo::bs. do you think will be popular. (.) in the future.
390 (0.6)
391 C: m:: (1.5) what sort of jobs? (3) hhhh:: this is
392 very hard to [sa::y] (0.5) ah::: (1.5) globally?
(002150T130)

In the above extract (Part 3), the examiner uses an unscripted explicit marker of topic change “let’s look into the future”. Here, the examiner is signalling a topic shift/change from current time as a frame to a future, hypothetical, situation. As previously demonstrated (Seedhouse and Egbert, 2004, p 51), unmotivated and unprepared shifts in perspective may cause confusion for the candidates. Therefore, the use of explicit markers of topic shift are recommended, particularly in the case of questions involving a shift of perspective.

In the data, there are some instances in which an unmarked topic shift appears to create interactional trouble for candidates, as in the following extract (candidate score of 7.0)
The authors’ recommendation is that examiners should mark all kinds of topic shift in an explicit way. This would provide clear and consistent signalling to candidates; at present this sometimes does not occur in Parts 2 and 3.

2.3 Examiner follow-ups to candidate responses

When candidates have produced a response to a question, examiners employ a variety of next moves. These are either to: i) move onto the next topic question from the script/frame; or ii) demonstrate to the candidate they expect more of a response, which usually involves particular uses of back channels; or iii) employ a device to seek clarification or expansion on the candidate’s response.

2.3.1 Move onto the next topic question from the script/frame

Extract 6

122 C: erm (.) since kindergarten i think most people in hong kong start learning english (0.2) since kindergarten (0.7) erm (0.2) and (0.7) and erm (1) they learn english continuously (0.5) when they progress to secondary school or or even university they they er (0.4) they still need to learn english (0.5)

128 E: why did you choose to learn english and not another language (0.6)

(005756T130)

2.3.2 Demonstrate to the candidate that they expect more of a response

Extract 7

41 E: okay (0.6) so can you tell me some of the other good things about the apartment.

43 (0.6)

44 C: er the apartment is (.) very comfortable= =m hm=

46 C: =because it has (0.5) two back doors (0.2)

48 E: = m hm=

49 C: =which is er (0.3) overlooking the gardens i’ve m†a::i de (0.2)

51 E: = m hm (0.3)

52 (0.3)

53 C: and er it has erm (0.3) good (exit? m: it comes there if there is) a f¶¶re (0.4)

56 E: = m ¶hm (0.3)

57 (0.3)

58 C: and er it’s co- convenient for:: (.) cooking:: (0.6) for
59  playing because we have a playground at the ba[ck]
60  [oh] (0.4) okay
(00334T133)

In lines 48, 51 and 56, the examiner employs “m hm” as a tacit request for more output. Back channelling of this kind is widely employed by examiners as a prompt for more output and is understood as such by candidates. Back channelling is generally delivered as “m hm”, although “m::” also occurs, for example in the extract below.

Extract 8
111  C: well i usually spend my holidays at ↓home.
112  (0.2)
113  E: → ↑m:
114  (0.3)
115  C: because (.).
(00334T133)

2.3.3 Employ a device to seek clarification or expansion on the candidate’s response

Such devices are a) scripted why? questions, b) unscripted why? questions and c) unscripted miscellaneous prompts.

a) Scripted why? follow-up questions (Part 1)

Extract 9
226  E: sure (.).
227  (0.4)
228  C: oh:: yes::?=  
229  E: → =why.
230  (.)
231  C: names are important because (0.3) you are using your names in terms of er legalities?=
(0034T133)

Scripted why/why not? follow-up questions occur in Part 1 to ensure that topics are developed and that candidates do not simply provide yes/no answers. However, examiners do not always ask the why/why not? follow-up questions, as in the example below.

Extract 10
78  E: =let’s go on to talk about fr- (.). clothes and fashion (0.4)
79  are you interested in fashion?
80  (0.6)
81  C: up yes [now i am ]  
82  E: → [hm m m hm] do you enjoy shopping for clothes?
83  (0.8)
84  C: ah i do:::. (.). i do want and love to::: [erm ] shopping but= (9 lines omitted)
94  E: =m:: m:. .hh what kind of clothes do you like.
95  (0.4)
96  C: er:m:: (1.6) i i am fond of wearing:: pants::=  
97  E: =|^m:: m:[::::]
98  C: [polo] and shirts:
99  (0.3)
100  E: → m:: ↓m:::. (0.6) has the way people feel about clothes and fashion changed recently?
102  (0.3)
(07771T132)
In the extract above, the examiner does not ask any why/why not? follow-up questions on two separate occasions, even though these are scripted.

It is recommended that examiners should always ask scripted why/why not? follow-up questions as otherwise the candidates may not develop that particular topic.

b) Unscripted why? questions in Parts 2 and 3

Extract 11

190 C: m::::::::::: (. ) probably i think <people try to follow fashion more nowadays>
191 (0.5)
192 E: → "why d’you think that (0.3) is:::
193 (0.7)
194 C: i dunno from everyone ar(hhh)ound me i guess?
196 (1.3)
(000125T132)

c) Unscripted miscellaneous prompts

These include “really?”, “do you think so?”, “yeah?” and clarification requests, as in the extracts below.

Extract 12

188 (0.6) and a comment (0.3) and he has been writing for than 189 newspaper for over thirty years 190 (0.5)
191 E: → really?
191 (. )
192 C: yeah (0.2) erm::: (0.2) and (0.7) another thing i like (0.3)
193 er (. ) that er newspaper because it’s (0.2) very neutral (0.4)
(005756T130)

Extract 13

265 (0.4) if they think it is interesting then they will go and buy
266 it and some argue that it would actually erm help the circulation
267 (0.3)
268 E: → do you think so?=
269 C: =i i personally don’t think so (0.2) maybe because of my (0.2)
270 personal habit (0.4) because i i i: wi- will only (0.4) buy it
271 when i (0.6) believe the: what the author says in the (0.2) er
272 newspaper (wha- i believe of them)
273 (0.2)
274 E: m::::::=
(005756T130)

Extract 14

89 C: yes (. ) for sure
90 (0.2)
91 E: → "yeah?"=
92 C: =coz that’s:: the way i communicate to all my close friends
93 (0.4) and i keep in touch them (0.5) so it’s quite hhh (0.3)
94 useful (thing) (0.7) for me
95 (0.3)
(00020T130)
Extract 15

266 C: beca::use (0.6) er:::. (0.2) people now a::n technologies
267 because of technologies are more competent?
268 (0.8)
269 E: "hm::: (0.3) [how-]
270 C: [(inaudible))]
271 E: =stressful then.
272 (0.8)
273 C: well:: such as the traffic that we know (.) in our country
(008004T134)

All of these prompts have a similar interactional function in that they require a response from the candidate and return the turn to the candidate; the evidence from the data is that they are understood as such by candidates.

3 ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1 Research Question 1: How is topic developed in the three parts of the Speaking Test?

This section focuses on how topic is related to the overall interactional organisation of the Speaking Test. CA institutional discourse methodology attempts to relate, not only the organisation of the interaction, but also individual interactional devices to the core institutional goal. The organisation of turn-taking, sequence and repair are tightly and rationally organised in relation to the institutional goal of standardisation and ensuring valid assessment of English speaking proficiency. Seedhouse and Egbert (2006) found that 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. Overall, the organisation of repair in the Speaking Test has a number of distinctive characteristics. Firstly, it is conducted according to strict 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.

In a similar way to turn-taking, sequence and repair, topic is standardised in furtherance of the institutional goal. In the Speaking Test, the topic of the talk is pre-determined by the central IELTS administration, written out in advance in scripts and is introduced by the examiner. Candidates are evaluated on (amongst other things) their ability to develop a nominated topic (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, p 69, Part 1). “Can the examiner ask an unscripted follow-up question in Part 3? Yes.” (IELTS Examiner Training Material 2001, p 71). In the data, management of topic within the IELTS Test is almost entirely determined by the examiner’s script and how this script is interactionally implemented throughout each individual interview. There are asymmetrical rights to topic management between examiner and candidate. These characteristics are directly related to the institutional goal of ensuring validity in the assessment of English speaking proficiency. The organisation of topic in the Speaking Test must therefore be understood as inextricably entwined with the organisation of turn-taking, sequence and repair and as directly related to the institutional goal.
In the Speaking Test, there is an archetypal organisation which combines turn-taking, adjacency pair and topic, as follows. All examiner questions (with the exception of the administrative questions) contain two components: a) an adjacency pair component, which requires the candidate to provide an answer; and b) a topic component, which requires the candidate to develop a specific topic. This organisation can be called a ‘topic-based Q-A adjacency pair’. So in the Speaking Test, unlike in conversation, topic is always introduced by means of a question.

To obtain a high score, candidates need to do the following:
- understand the question they have been asked
- provide an answer to the question
- identify the topic inherent in the question
- develop the topic inherent in the question.

So in the Speaking Tests, topic is scripted and entwined with the organisations of turn-taking and sequence in order to ensure standardisation. Sacks (1992, p 541) argues, in relation to ordinary conversation, that topical organisation is an “accessory” to turn-taking and sequence. By contrast, topic is, in the Speaking Test, to some extent an organising principle for interaction, in that examiners have a script with a series of questions on a connected topic, eg films. Furthermore, topic is tightly entwined with turn-taking and sequence in the Speaking Test, which follows a string of topic-based question and answer sequences.

However, it is evident in the data that the question-answer component has priority over the topic component, since occasionally the two components do not coincide. Candidates can answer questions without developing topics.

Extract 16

142 E: do you think that you will travel **more** in the **future**
143 (0.4)
144 C: → ya[eh]
145 E: **[when]** you’re older.
146 (0.3)
147 C: → yeah
148 (0.5)
149 E: because you enjoy it (0.9) okay now ((name omitted)) in this part (0.7) i’m: **going** to give you a **topic**
(002381t132)

In the above extract, the candidate (score 4.0) provides minimal answers to the questions but does not engage with the topic in any way. The question-answer component has priority over the topic component in the rare event of conflict between the two, as is further illustrated in the extract below.

Extract 17

9 E: ((name omitted)) (0.2) alright (0.3) .hhh and can you tell me where you’re **from**
10 (0.7)
11 C: i’m originally from the philippines (. ) but for the last erm
12 (0.3) it’s like this before i came to canada in the year two
13 thousand i was working in thailand. (0.5) for three years for
14 an international organisation that **dealt** [with]
15 E: → [okay] >sorry sorry<
16 sorry to stop you i don’t mean to [(inaudible)] where are you=
17 C: [ha ha okay ]
18 E: from (0.3) the philippines right?
19 (0.3)
(00198T130)
In the above Part 1 extract, the candidate tries to talk about his/her job, shifting the topic from “where do you come from?” but is closed down by the examiner. Examiners may then prevent candidates from developing a topic at length if, in the examiner’s view, an answer has already been provided to a question. Also, the interview may continue if a minimal yes/no answer has been provided to a question, even if the topic has not been developed. For this reason, the adjacency pair component appears to take priority over the topic component. A rational reason for this is that the Test has a limited duration and the examiner must get through a set number of questions and keep to a timescale (Instructions to IELTS Examiners). Therefore, topics cannot be allowed to be developed indefinitely.

It may even be the case in Part 3, which is termed ‘two-way discussion’, that the question/answer component has priority over the topic component, as can be seen in the extract below. In 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 of the Test (which is called a ‘two-way discussion’), the examiner may not allow the candidate to shift topic to one of his/her choice.

Extract 18

let’s talk about public and private transport (0.6) can you describe (.) the public transport systems in your country (1.0)
C: I used to have eh the main eh (2.0) public transport and th-
(0.3) the main transport which are (0.3) which is used by the
public are the (0.5) buses (0.7) secondly if eh (0.3) there are
some urgent eh they use the taxis investment plans the banks
are (. ) given the (0.5) the (1.8) transport is eh (1.5) is eh
bad (0.7) today have eh (0.9) can’t I talk about the (0.3)
→ problems
(1.1)
E: → no=
C: =no (1.1)
E: just describe (.) the public transport systems in your country
(0219)

It is very rare for candidates to succeed in shifting the topic of the examiner’s question to one of their own choosing. In the few examples where they try to do so, they are generally not allowed to continue, as in Extract 18 above. Candidates are almost never allowed to introduce or shift a topic, even in Part 3. However, such a case does occur as a very rare exception, as below.

Extract 19

((inaudible)) (0.4) okay let’s talk about a little bit about
sports (0.5) er how interested are you in sports.
(0.5)
C: not a lo- haha[hhaha i hehehe]
E: [haha why not ]
(0.5)
E: why not
(0.3)
C: WHY NOT? BECause erm::: (1.6) ever since i can remember (0.4)
i never excelled in sports.=
(0.3)
E: =m¶:::
(0.3)
C: it’s always been ar:ts; (0.4) erm (0.8) arts an literature
mostly (. ) performing arts sometimes (0.8) er:: and when i
(0.3) when i graduated from high school <i knew (0.3) that>
(0.7) eventually i’m gonna (0.5) end up in the writing field
(0.3)
E: [m m hm]
C: [whic]h i did=
Here, the candidate (score 9.0) manages to shift the topic from sport to her own interests and her own career. It is all the more unusual that the examiner allows this in Part 1 of the Test.

We now consider how topic is managed in the three parts of the Speaking Test.

### 3.1.1 Topic in Part 1 of the Speaking Test

Part 1 starts with administrative business. Then, candidates answer general questions about a range of familiar topic areas. Part 1 is a succession of topic-based question-answer adjacency pairs.

The topics within the interview in Part 1 are strictly determined by the script, which is followed by the examiner. The first few turns are taken up with the administrative business of verifying identity, as in the extract below.

#### Extract 20

1. E: okay good afternoon my name is ((name omitted))
2. (0.3)
3. C: yeah my name is ((name omitted))
4. (0.2)
5. E: ((name omitted)) ok[ay c]an you say your full chinese name= [yeah]
6. C: [er:::] (0.3) ((name omitted))
7. (0.2)
8. E: great and this is your i d card (1.1) that’s fine thank you
9. (0.2) you can take tho[se ((inaudible))]
10. C: [((inaudible)) ]
11. (1)
12. E: okay: in this first part i’d just like to ask you some
13. questions about yourself
14. (.)
15. C: yes yes
16. (0.2)
17. E: er:: do you work or are you a student?
18. (005875)
Paul Seedhouse and Andrew Harris

After the opening sequence, the examiner shifts explicitly into the first ‘frame’; three frames are normally included in Part 1 and each frame contains connected questions on a topic, for example ‘where you live’.

- Do you live in a house or a flat?
- Tell me the good things about your house/flat.
- What is the area like where you live?
- Would you recommend this area as a place to live? (Why/why not?)

In Part 1, all examiner questions contain two components: a) an adjacency pair component, which requires the candidate to provide an answer; and b) a topic component, which requires the candidate to develop a specific topic. There is an explicit, marked, scripted shift to Part 2 on completion of the question-answer sequence.

3.1.2 Topic in Part 2 of the Speaking Test

In Part 2 (Individual long turn), the examiner gives the candidate a verbal prompt, which is written on a card. After one minute’s preparation, the candidate is asked to talk on that particular topic and the examiner listens without speaking, apart from occasional back-channels. In the candidate’s monologue in Part 2, the expectation is that the candidate will: a) follow the instruction; and b) provide an extended development of a topic.

The examiner may ask one or two scripted rounding-off questions related to the topic when the candidate has finished talking. 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, p 6). In the current data, these rounding-off questions generally integrate relatively smoothly into the topical flow, as in the extract below.

Extract 21

350 C: and i like this building because it is very famous.
351 (0.2)
352 E: m [hm]
353 C: [er] it it made er (.). dubai? as the number one tourist spots
354 in the world.=
355 E: =hm::: (0.4) okay so:: do other people like this building too?
356 (0.4)
357 C: ye:::;:i::s: they are coming all the ti::me. in dubai.
358 (0.2)
359 E: okay (0.2) thank you i’l have the er card back please? (1.1)

However, Seedhouse and Egbert (2006) pointed out that these types of questions are sometimes topically disjunctive in practice as they may not fit into the flow of interaction and topic which has already developed. They suggest that 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. In the extract below, for example, the rounding-off question leads to some trouble in comprehension for the candidate. The question was to describe something you do to help you relax and the candidate described watching TV.
Extract 22

E: okay alright i'll i'll er:: (0.3) er d'you erm (0.3) always relax in this way d'you always (0.6)
C: (uhu)
E: d'you always relax in the same way watching tv (1.1)
C: i'm sorry?
E: d'you always (0.3) relax in this way (0.7)
C: no: (0.6) and we have another way to relax to (0.2)
E: uhu (0.3)
C: such as ((inaudible))
E: okay. (0.3) alright thank you can i take this stuff back please (000130T134)

3.1.3 Topic in Part 3 of the Speaking Test

In the documentation, Part 3 is termed ‘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.” Part 3 differs from Part 1 in the following ways: there are more abstract and challenging questions and there are no scripted boundary markers for examiners. Although Part 3 is termed ‘two-way discussion’, it is almost identical to Part 1 interactionally, in that it consists of a series of topic-based question-answer adjacency pairs, as described above. Again, there are hardly ever any opportunities for candidates to introduce or shift topic and they are generally closed down when they try to do so.

From examination of the data, the reason why Part 3 fails to generate two-way discussion and remains interactionally almost identical to Part 1 is fairly clear. The scripts in Part 3 contain ‘themes’ and ‘sub-points’, which examiners are to use ‘to develop discussion’. However, what happens overwhelmingly in the data, is that examiners use these sub-points to ask questions which have the identical interactional structure inherent in them as Part 1 questions. That is, they contain: a) an adjacency pair component, which requires the candidate to provide an answer; and b) a topic component, which requires the candidate to develop a specific topic. To illustrate this point, let us compare an examiner script for Part 3 with the questions an examiner actually asks. The script reads:

“Publications
(explain) why most people buy newspapers (where you live)
(compare) reasons for buying magazines (rather than newspapers)
(speculate on ) how technology (e.g. the Internet) will affect those publications in the future.”

In the data these are delivered as:

Extract 23

E: (0.4) can you explain why mo:st people buy newspapers. (6 lines omitted)
E: how d’you compare (0.2) their reasons for (0.3) buying magazines. (9 lines omitted)
E: can you speculate on how technology for example. (0.6) internet will affect these publications in the future? (7150t130)
The Instructions for IELTS examiners (p 6) reads: “In Part 3, 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”. However, there are no precise instructions on how two-way dialogue might be established interactionally, and so by default, the examiners tend to ask a series of questions. Indeed, the Trainer’s Notes for Examiner Training (p 8) actually suggests a question format: “Examiners must adhere to the Part 3 topics but should put the questions in their own words using the bullet-pointed themes as a basis for their questions”. Moreover, there is no mechanism in the examiner script for allowing a two-way discussion to develop, ie the script contains points and the instruction “use sub-points to develop discussion”. There is, for example, no suggestion that the examiner might give up the controlling role and ask the candidate to ask him/her some questions on the topic. There are no evident guidelines, in the training documentation, for suggesting how Part 3 can be transformed into a two-way discussion. The term ‘two-way discussion’ implies that candidates should have some opportunity to introduce and shift topic and some control over turn-taking and sequence, but this happens extremely rarely in the data. The term implies that the discussion is intended to generate something like the two-way, abstract discussions in which candidates are expected to be engaged when they enter university and participate in small-group interactions.

Taking an overview of topic development in the Speaking Test as a whole, a problem is that it is almost entirely one-sided. Candidates have little or no opportunity to display their ability to introduce and manage topic development, ask questions or manage turn-taking. The clear empirical evidence is that Part 3 does not generate two-way discussion as was originally envisaged. There seem to be three basic ways of tackling this problem. The first is to change the labelling of Part 3 to ‘abstract discussion’ or something similar. However, this would still mean that there would be no two-way discussion at any point in the Speaking Test. A second way is to provide very precise guidelines and training for examiners as to how two-way discussion can be achieved in the current Part 3. This might be tackled by examining the mechanisms by which two-way dialogue becomes established in ordinary conversation. However, the topic-based question-answer archetype identified above seems to be such a strong attractor in this setting that we feel this would be difficult to achieve. Like the ubiquitous IRE pattern in classroom discourse, the topic-based question-answer sequence is the most economical method of carrying out a single cycle of institutional business. This means that any examiner question sequence would be likely to end up reverting to the archetype, no matter how much one tried to make it resemble two-way discussion.

A third alternative (and the authors’ strong recommendation) is to add a very short Part 4, which might last for two minutes. This part would specifically avoid the examiner asking any questions at all. Rather, the candidate would have the opportunity to lead a discussion and to ask the examiner topic-related questions. Part 4 could start in a number of ways. The examiner could introduce a topic by making an observation which the candidate can then follow up by asking a question. The observation would be related to topics previously discussed, eg ‘I went to see a film last week’ or ‘I went to France last year on holiday’. The candidate would ask questions about this and take on the management of topic development. Alternatively, the candidate could be instructed to ask the examiner questions about topics previously discussed. Or, the candidate could be allowed to introduce a topic of their own choice. Such a Part 4 would give candidates the chance to take a more active role and to develop topic in a different way. It would also allow a part of the Speaking Test to have a closer correspondence with interaction in university small-group settings, in which students are encouraged to ask questions and develop topics more actively. If adopted, this additional section should be trialled and the interaction analysed to establish whether it does resemble two-way interaction or not.
3.2 Research Question 2: How is topic developed with a high score, a mid-range score and a low score?

3.2.1 Characteristics of high scoring and low scoring tests

We comment in this section primarily on the difference between candidates with the highest and lowest scores. There is no simple relationship between the candidate’s score and their demonstration of effective topic development, since a multitude of factors affect the examiner’s ratings. However, as broad generalisations, it is reasonable to provide a list of the characteristics of high scoring and low scoring tests in relation to topic.

3.2.1.1 Length of turn

As a generalisation, candidates at the higher end of the scoring scale tend to have more instances of extended turns in which topic is developed in Parts 1 and 3. There is some evidence that very weak candidates produce short turns in Part 2. These often contain lengthy pauses. In Part 2, score may be linked with the duration of the candidate’s talk.

Extract 24

109 E: alright? (1.5) remember you have one to two minutes for this::;
110 s:o don’t worry if i stop you (0.7) i’ll tell you when the time
111 is up? (0.4) can you start speaking no::w pleas::e.
112 (0.7)
113 C: the job i’d like to do is sports management (0.6) then what i
114 need to bring the job is to manage the different kinds of
115 sports (0.5) and share advice with different sports people and
116 note their (0.7) feelings or attitude towards the sport they
117 ↑do (0.8) then (0.7) why- wa- they skills i need to the job
118 (0.2) can be:: (0.8) i have to be active in the sports i
119 ↑manage (0.5) and i have to be able to:: (0.8) know how the
120 sports:: is played and
121 (9.5)
122 E: thank you.
(000022t132)

The above Part 2 talk (score 5.0) lasts only 39 seconds. No causal connection can be established in this area, although this is anticipated in the Instructions to IELTS Examiners (p 6) “Weaker candidates may have difficulty in speaking for the full two minutes.” This phenomenon would require further quantitative investigation.

3.2.1.2 Topic trouble

There are, as a generalisation, fewer instances of topic trouble in the higher scoring candidates and more in the lower scoring candidates. As noted above, examiner questions contain two components: a) an adjacency pair component, which requires the candidate to provide an answer; and b) a topic component, which requires the candidate to develop a specific topic. Trouble may occur in relation to the question or the topic inherent in the question, or both.

Extract 25

38 E: and would you recommend this area as a place to live
39 (1.2)
40 C: in my::: (0.4) in my house.
41 (0.3)
42 E: would you recommend (.) the area (.) as a place (0.2) to live
43 (0.3)
44 C: erm:: (0.3) .hhh (0.6) ↑recommend.
45 (.)
46 E: m ↑hm
In the above extract (score 5.0), the candidate is, despite repetition, unable to: a) understand the question they have been asked; b) provide an answer to the question; c) identify the topic inherent in the question; and d) develop the topic inherent in the question.

Extract 26

In the above extract (score 4.0) the candidate is, despite repetition, unable to provide a relevant answer to the question or develop the topic inherent in the question. In both extracts, the candidate repeats a specific lexical item (“recommend” and “area”) using a specific repair initiation technique. This implies that their trouble in comprehension relates to that specific lexical item.

We consider below, in answer to the fourth sub-question, whether particular questions and topics generate trouble for candidates.

3.2.1.3 Display of engagement with topic

Extract 27

The candidate in the extract above (score 4.0) does provide an answer in line 143, and it is topic-relevant. However, the answer provided is not one which would enable the examiner to continue to develop the topic further. In this sense, the response is topic closing rather than topic engaging. Although the response is linguistically correct, it does not provide a linguistic display of higher-level competence (see indicator scale) and uses a basic level of syntactic construction and lexical choice.
Extract 28
165 (0.4) can you explain why most people buy newspapers.
166 (0.6)
167 C: → erm basically to update themselves (0.4) to::: (.) erm (0.3)
168 give themselves give themselves information they (.) might need
169 (0.4) for:: (0.4) their everyday lives for their work for their
170 erm (0.6) for their studies

(007150t130)

In the above extract (score 8.0), the candidate engages with the topic by expanding beyond minimal information and by providing multiple examples. The response would enable the examiner to develop the topic further.

3.2.1.4 Topical coherence

Extract 29
145 E: what would you like to change about your eating habits:
146 (1.4)
147 C: my eating habit uh
148 (0.2)
149 E: m:: (2.3)
150 C: → i don’t know how to say ah (0.2) because (0.7) i’m not (5.5)
151 maybe i will- hhh .hhh i (rarely) think (0.5) so:: (1.7) i
152 know:: (2.4) ((inaudible)) for me (.i) i just (0.7) (i need for
153 other paper) er::: (0.3) i just eat only
154 (1.1)

(002144t130)

Candidates with low scores sometimes struggle to construct an argument and a coherent answer, as in the extract above (score 4.0). Turns often feature lengthy pauses. Given the short duration of the Test, candidates would be better advised to say that they cannot answer a question and move to one which enables them to display their linguistic ability, rather than struggle for a long time with questions they cannot answer.

Extract 30
128 E: why did you choose to learn english and not another language
129 (0.6)
130 C: erm: (1.8) in hong kong i think commercially (0.3) erm english
131 is very useful (0.9) for business and also erm (0.3) in hong kong
132 there is a lot of (. people coming from different countries
133 (0.2) so if you can speak a good english you can communicate with
134 those people (0. )who do not know cantonese or speak mandarin
135 (0.2)

(5756t130)

The candidate in the above extract (score 8.0) develops the topic coherently, using markers ‘also’ and ‘so’ to connect clauses.
3.2.1.5 Syntax

Extract 31

101 fashion (. ) are you interested in fashion?
102 (0.3)
103 C: not interested in that no=
104 E: =why not?
105 (0.5)
106 C: er (0.2) i don’t fee::l (0.6) i don’t think it’s necessary to
107 be fashionable as long as you are comfortable in what you are
108 wearing?

(2001t134)

In the above extract (score 9.0), lines 109-111 the candidate provides an answer which engages with
the topic and which also displays the ability to construct a sentence with a subordinate clause.

Extract 32

120 E: m hm (1.2) do you think children should be encouraged to take
121 an interest in sports?
122 (.)
123 C: ye::s:: (0.3) [because] (0.4) m:: (0.3) it’s not (stronger)=
124 E: [why::? ]
125 C: =(1) the- er (1.2) if our children? (1.1) don’t like sport
126 (0.3) they will no (0.6) there (0.2) maybe er::: (1) no:: (.)
127 stronger (0.7) oh:. (2.3) the happy (0.2) maybe (0.2) was (0.5)
128 was then er sport
129 (0.5)

(002144t130)

By contrast, the candidate in the above extract (score 4.0) not only fails to develop the topic in a
meaningful way, but also fails to construct anything resembling a complete sentence.

3.2.1.6 Lexical choice

Candidates with a high score may develop topic using lexical items which are less common and which
portray them as having a higher level of education and social status.

Extract 33

77 E: m hm: (0.3) what do you enjoy about using computer
78 (1.2)
79 C: erm::: (0.6) i like it because it’s er (0.5) it sort of gives
80 you a sense of exclusivity not many people know how to use the
81 computers well these days
(40 lines omitted)
122 E: [he he he he] (.) [.hhhh] what kinda clothes do
123 you li::ke
124 (0.4)
(4 lines omitted)
129 C: more formal attire (0.7) makes me look
130 better anyway (0.2) “yeah”

(2011t134)

The choice of uncommon lexical items by the candidate (score 9.0) features “exclusivity” and “attire”.
This combines with the development of topic in both extracts to construct the identity of a top rank
professional.
Topic development in the IELTS Speaking Test

Extract 34

204 E: [okay i’ll ask] you another question (0.5) er:mm (0.6) can you compare ideas that architects (0.2) and the general public (.) have (0.3) about buildings (7.4)

208 C: → m::: (1.2) ((inaudible)) (2.7) erm (1.6) i think (0.3) architect (0.4) erm (4.3) is person (1.3) “who” (0.3) who (1.7) create the building (1.3) ra- erm (1.3) it h- (0.4) i think (4.3) they (0.6) they ch- erm (4.2) they should (0.8) keep (0.6) erm (1.9) (00128t133)

The response above (candidate score 5.0) features very lengthy pauses, as well as an answer that is lacking in coherence and direction. The candidate merely recycles lexical items used by the examiner in the question.

3.2.1.7 Identity construction

Through the way they develop topic in their answers, candidates construct an identity which may relate to their score band in some way. Candidates who achieved a very high score typically developed topics that constructed the identity of an intellectual and a (future) high-achiever on the international stage. The candidate in Extract 35 below, for example, achieved a score of 9.0.

Extract 35

19 E: right so (0.9) can you tell me about your study first

20 C: [e::rm] my major is british american studies? at (deleted) university? (0.4) [and ] basically= (right)

24 C: → =what we do is we study:: (0.8) the essential core of british and american:: (0.7) society? culture politics literature?

67 E: m::. (0.3) okay .hhh al:right (0.3) and erm::: (0.4) what- what kind of (0.5) work or what kind of career d’ya (.) d’ya hope to do in the future.

70 C: → um what i hope to do is (0.3) either (.) between diplomatic studies? (0.2) o::r (.) something like (.) er policy:::. (0.6) po- policy formulation in terms of development studies or environmental studies.

Another candidate with a score of 9.0 explains in the extract below that s/he is not interested in sports (this is part of Extract 19 above).

Extract 36

98 C: WHY NOT? BECause erm::: (1.6) ever since i can remember (0.5)

99 i never excelled in sports.=

101 C: → it’s always been arts: (0.4) erm (0.8) arts an literature mostly (.) performing arts sometimes (0.8) er::: and when i (0.3) when i graduated from high school <i knew (0.3) that>

105 (0.7) eventually I’m gonna (0.5) end up in the writing field (000198t130)
Candidates with low scores, by contrast, developed topics in a way which portrayed them as somebody with modest and often localised aspirations. The candidate in extract 37 below had a score of 5.0:

Extract 37

119  E:  =m hm (0.3) and has learning english been difficult for you.
120    (0.4)
121  C:  m::: (.). actually it (1.2) difficult for me because the second
122    (.). language (0.3) and normally i never speak (0.7) english (1)
123    just thai::: [([inaudible)])] (.). [yeah]

This response above portrays the candidate as a weak language learner who rarely communicates on an international level.

Extract 38

21  E:  and can you tell me the good things about your hous:::e
22    (12.5)
23  E:  tell me the good things about your hous:::e
24    (1)
25  C:  ooit’s local oo
26    (0.6)
27  E:  oo(m (0.3) hm:oo
28    (7.5)
29  E:  <what is the area (.). like> where you live

A number of the themes in the above discussion are now pulled together by examining Extract 38. The above response (score 5.0) illustrates some of the characteristics identified above. In line 22, there is a very long pause; the candidate does not request question repetition and this is eventually supplied by the examiner. When the answer is provided in line 25, it does (partly) answer the question and is linguistically correct. However, it does not enable the examiner to continue to develop the topic further and so is topic closing. The response is minimal and actually only identifies one good thing about the house, whereas the question specifies “things”. The syntax employed is at a minimal, basic level and the lexical choice is very limited. Furthermore, the identity created by the candidate is one of someone with very local interests.

3.2.2 Scoring in the Part 2 Individual Long Turn

In the candidate’s monologue in Part 2, the expectation is that the candidate will: a) follow the instructions; and b) provide an extended development of a topic. Topic development in a monologue is not analysable using CA techniques, since there is no interaction as such, although examiners occasionally produce back-channelling. However, by examining two monologues from Part 2, one with a high score and one with a low score, it is possible to identify some of the key features of topic development.

Extract 39

258  C:  okay (1.6) erm ((clears throat)) i’d like you to describe a job
259    (0.3) you think (0.4) would be interesting.
Part 2
260    (45)
261  E:  alright remember that you have one to two minutes (0.3) for
262    this so don’t worry if i stop you (0.4) i’ll tell you when the
263    time is up (0.7) can you start speaking now please.
264    (0.5)
265  C:  okay i think this job is er::: (1.3) being a doctor (0.3)
medical practitioner (1.6) especially those who::: (0.5) erm
(1.6) treat er (0.5) very (0.6) common diseases (0.4) not
specialist (2.2) i think it’s (0.3) quite interesting because
er you- (0.3) you meet a lot of people (1.4) different kinds of
people (1.1) and er (0.7) people who are having problems (0.3)
people who are- people who are in pain (0.6) and er (0.7)
you have to try as much as you can (0.7) to:: make them feel
better (1.4) or try to solve your problems you cannot solve
you- you put them in a state that they will feel more at ease
(0.4) “with with him” (0.9) for example eh somebody (0.3)
selling ah:: (0.6) let’s say:: (0.8) erm:::. (2) selling er:::
let’s say:: (1.7) MALaria (0.4) the illness is common in my
plaque (1) okay (0.4) the patients who have this ((inaudible))
condition erm:: (0.3) vomiting and all (1) this is very:::
(0.2) ah:: troublesome (0.4) it (makes (0.2) makes you feel
mistaken) (0.7) (it’s all) (. ) it’s up to the doctor to make
you relax (0.4) even though your sick nearly won’t go away
(0.8) right after you see the doctor? but (0.7) the doctor must
try to (0.3) er:: talk you to:: (1.2) er:: feel at ease (0.5)
jus- (.) just to let you know that okay these are the
medications i want to give you=these are the things you must do
(0.8) and er (0.7) hopefully (. ) it will work for you (0.8)
it’s all:: (0.3) i think that is a very interesting job
(0.2)
E: alright. (0.3) thank you

The first point to note is that the candidate (score 9.0) clearly answers the question “describe a job you think (0.4) would be interesting”. Having identified the job of medical practitioner, all of the subsequent talk is related to this job and why it would be interesting. In line 265, the candidate identifies the generic term ‘doctor’ and then narrows the focus to the sub-topic of types of doctor, moving to medical practitioner and non-specialists who treat common diseases (lines 266-8). In line 268, the topic shifts in stepwise fashion to why the job is interesting, the reason being because you meet many people and have to try to cure them. There is then an exemplification of an illness (malaria) which then leads stepwise to a description of symptoms and how patients feel and how the doctor should communicate with patients. So within the overall topic of the doctor’s job, there is a good deal of stepwise, flowing development of sub-topics as well as shifts of perspective, presenting illness from the patient’s and doctor’s perspectives.

Extract 40

E: okay (4) ((rustling paper)) there’s some paper::: (0.7) and
pencil? (0.3) for making notes? (0.8) and here’s your topic?=i
would like you to describe your favourite newspaper or
magazine.
(0.3)
C: .hhhh .hhhh (2.5) "((inaudible))"
The first point to note is that the candidate (score 4.0) never actually answers the question “describe your favourite newspaper or magazine” in that one is never actually named or described. The general overall topic to which the candidate is talking seems to be ‘say something about newspapers and magazines’ and no sharp topical focus is achieved. Lines 190-199 mentions the type of articles and information contained in newspapers and magazines in general. In line 201, there is a shift to where Malaysian people read newspapers. However, this does not appear to be a motivated, stepwise topic shift. In line 206, there is a stepwise transition to where the candidate likes to read a magazine. From line 210 onwards, the topic seems to drift to other ways that the candidate and other Chinese Malaysians spend their time, including tuna fishing! This has drifted well away from the original question.

Examiners may take the following features of monologic topic development into account in Part 2:

a) Is the question answered?

b) Is the topic focus clear or not?

c) Is there movement from topic to topic and/or sub-topic?

d) Is such movement stepwise, motivated and flowing, or not?

e) Is topic development coherent or not?

f) Do candidates mark topic/sub-topic shift clearly or not?

g) For what length of time is the topic developed?
3.3 Research Question 3: How does the examiner’s interactional style contribute to topic development?

Brown and Hill (1998, p 15) found that examiners’ interactional style was variable and this had an impact on candidate performance. However, this study related to a previous test (the IELTS Oral Interview) and with the introduction of the Speaking Test, examiner contributions are scripted and behaviour standardised. The current dataset reveals that, in general, there is very little variation in the interaction style of examiners. This can be related to the institutional goal of ensuring standardisation and a level playing field for all candidates. Seedhouse and Egbert (2005) found that when examiners diverged from instructions this sometimes gave an advantage to some candidates. In cases where there is some variation in the interactional style of examiners, the factors that seem most relevant are:

- topic shift markers and their use
- interruptions to keep candidates on-script or on-topic
- use of backchannels in terms of amount and function
- support in repair
- deviations from the script
- use of follow-up questions.

There is occasionally some variation in examiners’ interactional styles in terms of the extent to which an examiner either keeps tight control of the interaction, moving from one question to the next, or by contrast, allows candidates some interactional space to develop topics. In the extract below, a rare example can be seen of an examiner relaxing control.

Extract 41

<p>| | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>E:</td>
<td>thank you (2.4) fine thank you. (0.4) now in this first part</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>i’d like to ask you some questions about yourself (0.6) er</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>let’s talk about what you do=do you work or are you a student.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>C:</td>
<td>i just started a new job last week</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>(0.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>E:</td>
<td>= u hu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>C:</td>
<td>um (.) i work as an administrative assistant for:: er::</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>(.) for the ((inaudible)) shopping centre in ((inaudible))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>just only the (bento) retail services?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>(0.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>E:</td>
<td>= u [hu]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>C:</td>
<td>[th]e (bento) group (0. ) [of can]ada=</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>E:</td>
<td>= [oh and]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>E:</td>
<td>=and what do you do in your job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>C:</td>
<td>= administrative assistant (0.2) i (.) basically just give</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>administrative support to the general manager</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>(.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>E:</td>
<td>= m hm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>C:</td>
<td>but it’s a small office and everybody pitch in- (. ) pitches in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>so. (0.5) erm it’s (0.6) it’s really (. ) teamwork. (0.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>you’[know].</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>E:</td>
<td>= [m:::]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>(0.7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>C:</td>
<td>= (0.4) provide help (0.3) wherever and whenever you can=</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>E:</td>
<td>=m hm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the above extract, (score 9.0) the examiner asks only two questions. By back-channelling rather than moving straight on to the next question, the examiner allows the candidate leeway to develop a topic. This example is particularly unusual in that it occurs in Part 1, in which examiners normally move straight from one question to the next.

At present, some yes/no questions in Part 1 have follow-up questions and some do not. The consequences of this can be seen below.

Extract 42
40 than::: (0.3) er::: (0.4) there’s an increased m- off (0.2) on
41 ou:::r duties (. ) because of the twelve hours (0.3) twelve
42 hours shift instead of eight hours shift
43 (0.4)
44 E: [m:::. (0.4) are you happy (0.3) with your working
45 [conditions?]?
46 C: [of course ] i am:::
47 (1.8)
48 E: .hhhh let’s talk a little abou::t sports
(008004t134)

In the above extract (score 6.0), the candidate indicates that his/her shifts have increased from eight to 12 hours and then answers yes to the question of whether s/he is happy with the working conditions. However, there is no scripted follow-up question to this intriguing situation and the topic is shifted. Examiner instructions are that unscripted follow-up questions may not be asked in Part 1.

Extract 43
69 E: yeah. .hhh did you do sports at school.
70 (0.5)
71 C: at school? (0.2) no:::
72 (0.3)
73 E: how did you feel about that.
74 (0.3)
75 C: well::: i feel er::: (0.5) er::: disappointed (0.2) because:::e
76 (0.3) er::: if i wer:::tt:: (0.8) taught to::: (0.2) play (0.2)
77 some sports during my school days (0.5) i might be::: very
78 well (0.2) now in playing some (0.5) areas in sports
(008004t134)

Extracts 42 and 43 are of the same candidate. The examiner asks two yes/no questions. In Extract 42, the examiner does not ask a follow-up question, whereas in Extract 43 the examiner does. Note that in the second case, the candidate (score 6.0) engages with the topic and produces a fairly lengthy response.

At present some yes/no questions in Part 1 have scripted follow-up questions and some do not. It is recommended that all such yes/no questions in Part 1 should have scripted follow-up questions to ensure that all students have the chance to develop a topic.
Extract 44

78 E: =let’s go on to talk about fr- (. ) clothes and fashion (0.4)
79 are you interested in fashion?
80 (0.6)
81 C: up yes [now i am ]
82 E: [hm m m hm] do you enjoy shopping for clothes?
83 (0.8)
84 C: ah i do::: (. ) i do want and love to::: [erm ] shopping but=
85 E: [hm hm]
86 C: =financia[lly::: huh huh .hhh ] (. ) but i- (. ) we are=
87 E: [hu hu hu hu hu hu hu .]
88 C: ={(inaudible)) financially [then::: .hhh we are] kinda having=
89 E: [↑m m:: ↑m m:::]
90 C: =som::e fi[nancial-]
91 E: [↑m:: m:::.
92 C: [er::m: co]nstraints right now.=
93 E: [↑m: m:::]
94 E: =m::: m:::. hh what kind of clothes do you like.
95 (0.4)
96 C: er::m: (1.6) i i am fond of wearing:: pants::=
97 E: =↑m: m:::.
98 C: [polo] and shirts:
99 (0.3)
100 E: m::: ↓m:::. (0.6) has the way people feel about clothes and
101 fashion changed recently?
102 (0.3)

Why/why not? follow-up questions are scripted to follow every question in the above extract, but the examiner does not ask any of them. In lines 84-92, the candidate develops one topic without further prompting; two other questions are answered but the topic remains undeveloped. It is recommended that examiners should always ask scripted why/why not? follow-up questions (provided they cohere with the flow of the conversation) as otherwise the candidates may not develop that particular topic.

There is also variation in Part 1 in relation to whether examiners actually ask scripted why/why not? follow-up questions or not.

3.4 Research Question 4: To what extent do examiners follow the briefs they have been given in relation to topic? In cases where they diverge from the briefs, what impact does this have on the interaction?

Examiners rarely diverge from the brief in the corpus. However, when they do so this takes a number of forms which each have a potential to impact on the interaction. Examiners may go off-brief in a number of ways, some of which are exemplified in the answer to the Research Question 2 above. These are all rare in the data, but one of these instances is examined here, namely evaluation of candidate turns. 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, p 5). It is very noticeable in the data that examiners do not verbalise positive or negative evaluations of candidate talk, with some very rare exceptions, such as the extract below.
In the above three extracts from the same test (score 8.0), the examiner positively evaluates the candidate’s turns. There is no interactional evidence that this has any influence on the interaction, but this does conflict with the institutional goal of standardisation. There are no examples of examiners producing negative evaluations of candidate turns. However, there is just one example of an examiner challenging the candidate’s opinion.

Extract 46

223 E:  m hm (1.2) "right?" (0.2) compare the ways of relaxing that MEN choose (0.3) with those that WOMEN choose:
224 (0.2)
225 C:  okay that’s a tough one .hhh ah [ha ha ha] (0.5) well i guess
226 E:  [ha ha ha]
227 C:  (0.4) more: (1.5) like (0.5) >when they do things to relax< they (0.3) kind of choose non physical activity i fee:1
228 (0.3)
229 E:  m hm=
230 C:  =more towards sitting around and talking=whereas women (0.7) erm i hope i don’t s-- (0.2) er sound chauvinistic >or anything<
231 but some wo[m en ] like (0. ) they like to do house work?
232 E:  [ha he]
233 (0.2)
234 E:  u hu
235 (.)
236 C:  erm: (0.6) some women i’m not saying all of them hhh .hhh erm
237 (0.6) they like to do things that’s physical y’know
238 (0.4)
239 E:  m [hm]
240 C:  [maybe] some women like to do rock climbing or something they like to do something physical as opposed to men who like to do
241 (0.4) things that’s don’t require any physical activity
242 (0.3)
243 E:  m hm (0.4) now where did you get this:: (0.8) n::: this notion
244 of women (0.7) d-- do you know people who[:]
245 C:  [NO]::: no::: [no:::]
246 E:  [or is]
247 (0.3)
248 C:  =it’s just an op- opinion=
249 E:  =it’s just an opinion fERM it’s not based on anybody. or
250 anything? an i=
251 E:  =u hu
In the above extract, the examiner challenges the evidence for the candidate’s idea that women relax by doing housework. Since the candidate’s score was 8.0, the examiner’s intervention does not seem to have been accompanied by any negative view of the candidate’s ability.

Extract 47

In the above extract (score 7.0), the examiner expresses surprise at the candidate’s position and then comments on the nature of the Speaking Test in lines 385-8. This may be considered off-brief. On the other hand, in Part 3, examiners are supposed to be able to ask unscripted follow-up questions in order to develop a two-way dialogue.

Extract 48

In the above extract, the examiner could be said to be helping the candidate in line 178 by going off-brief, proffering vocabulary which develops the topic and which is adopted by the candidate in 180-182. However, the score awarded was 6.0.
3.5 Research Question 5: Do specific topics cause trouble for candidates?
Do specific questions within a topic sequence cause trouble for candidates?
If so, what is the nature of the trouble?

Seedhouse and Egbert (2006) examined instances in which scripted questions generate trouble and topic disjunction. They examined particularly the question “Would you like to be in a film?”, which caused trouble for a striking number of candidates. The explanation for the trouble involved perspectives and footing. The problem question involved an unmarked and unmotivated shift in perspective to a fantasy question in which candidates had to imagine they had the opportunity to be a film star. As some extracts revealed, some candidates said they had never thought about this and had difficulty with the shift in perspective. In this section, examples from this data set are examined of specific questions that caused problems for candidates.

3.5.1 Part 1 questions

In the data, a number of candidates encountered trouble in relation to a series of questions about their names. The scripted sequence reads:

- Can you tell me what your name means?
- How was your name chosen for you?
- Do you like your name(s)?
- Are names important? (Why/why not?)
- Would you ever change your name? (When?)

The candidate below had a score of 6.0.

Extract 49

92 E: hm::: (.3) .hhh em::: (.2) let’s move on to talk about names:::
93 (0.2) erm::: can you tell me what your name means
94 (.7)
95 C: my name means er sta::r that’s what i know::: (.2) eh huh
96 [.hhh]
97 E: [.m:::] .hh and how was your name chosen for you.
98 (0.6)
99 C: → how was my na::me
100 (0.3)
101 E: chosen (.2) for [you:].
102 C: [chos]en? (.7) ah well i have no ide::a
103 actually (0.7) but er i’ve seen from a book that is (0.5) er::
104 from the word estrella (.2) it means |star
105 (.)
106 E: m:::. (0.2) d’you like your name?
107 (.)
108 C: of course i like
109 (0.9)
110 E: are are names important.
111 (0.7)
112 C: → come again?
113 (0.3)
114 E: <are na::mes important>
115 (0.4)
116 C: all names?
117 E: (.3) <are:: na::mes (.) important>
118 (0.2)
119 C: potent?
The candidate in the above extract requires repetition of a name question once in line 99 and then initiates repair four times in relation to “are names important?” but is still unable to understand it. Note that the examiner goes beyond the brief here, which is to repeat the question once only. The candidate below had a score of 7.0 but also had some trouble with the question sequence:

Extract 50

81 E: thank you (.). hhh let’s move on to talk about names:. (. can you tell me what your name means:
82 (0.5)
83 C: → my name is ((name omitted))
84 (0.2)
85 E: can you tell me what your name means:
86 (0.2)
87 C: my name means love ((name omitted)) means love
(12 lines omitted)
101 E: are names important.
102 (0.3)
103 C: they’re very important
104 E: [why.]
105 (0.3)
106 C: because: e (0.5) they like- (3.7) eh (0.2) things would be empty without na(h)m(h)es
(000021t130)

Here the candidate mishears the question initially in line 82. In line 106 s/he needs a 3.7 second pause and three shorter pauses to think of a reason why names are important.

Sometimes in the data, name questions generate long and tortuous trouble and repair sequences, as with the candidate below (score 5.0):

Extract 51

103 E: okay yes (.). hhh let’s move on to talk about names:. (0.4) can you tell me what your name means?
105 (0.7)
106 C: → name? m[ean?]?
107 E: [YOur] name
108 (0.7)
109 C: ((name omitted)) ((long stretch))
110 (0.3)
111 E: ah yes ((nickname omitted)) or your chinese name. it’s up to you.
113 (0.4)
114 C: oh (0.5) and ((name omitted)) is- (. my name
115 (0.2)
The sequence of questions are certainly connected in that they are all connected to the topic of ‘names’. However, there appear to be a number of problems with this sequence. Firstly, name-asking is part of the administrative business at the start of the Test, so further questions on names may prove confusing to the candidate. Secondly, candidates may have a number of names, including nicknames and ‘English names’, so it may take a while to establish which name exactly is being referred to, as in Extract 51. Thirdly, candidates may not know what the meaning of the name is, or why it was chosen. Finally, some people may feel these questions are too intimate or intrusive, depending on their culture. The sequence could even imply some criticism of the candidate’s name.

3.5.2 Intellectually challenging questions in Part 3

In Part 3, there is some evidence that even top-level students find some questions intellectually challenging and problematic.

Extract 52

The candidate in the above extract previously answered a number of difficult questions very well and achieved a score of 8.0. However, the candidate found the question “could you speculate on any future changes in the relationship between education and work” very difficult to answer coherently.
The same question was found equally challenging by the candidate in the extract below:

**Extract 53**

19 E: what about the relationship <between education (.) and (0.3) work.> (0.3) how will it change in the future.
20 (1.6)
21 C: erm: (0.4) education and work change in the future in a sense that? (0.8) erm (2.5) if you need to: (. ) if (. ) if (0.4) ye-
22 (0.2) th- (. ) if there is education. (0.4) it would be very
23 (0.4) erm: m (0.7) of course you if you are educated (0.4) work
24 is very much:: (. ) erm at hand (0.3) you know you will always
25 get a job. (0.5) if you are educated. (0.5) so without erm
26 (0.3) education (0.6) perhaps:: erm (0.5) work will be:: very
27 slippery
(7083t132)

The candidate in the extract above achieved a grade of 7.0 but also failed to get to grips with this topic. The topic of the relationship between education and work is one which candidates should all have some experience of, and may have some opinions, on. However, they may never have thought about how this relationship might change in the future and, in general, the question assumes a very high level of education and professional experience.

To sum up, problematic questions may involve an unmotivated shift in perspective, may require specialist knowledge or experience which may not be available to most candidates, or may be puzzling in some way, eg “are names important?” Questions which may refer to a number of possible items (eg “what does your name mean?”) may generate lengthy repair sequences. 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 combined with analysis of the resultant interaction is therefore recommended.

### 4 CONCLUSION

#### 4.1 Summary of findings

Topic is a vital construct in the Speaking Test, in which the organisation of topic must be understood as inextricably entwined with the organisation of turn-taking, sequence and repair and as directly related to the institutional goal. There are a number of interactional resources drawn on by examiners to mark a new topic or a topic shift. Within Part 1 of the Test, these topic boundary markers (TBM) are pre-determined by the script, though examiners occasionally depart from the script. In Parts 2 and 3 of the Test, examiners are free to employ TBMs at their discretion, which leads to a wide variation in how topic boundaries are marked. There are three ways to mark a topic boundary in this corpus, namely unmarked topic boundary, generic marking and explicit marking of topic boundary. When candidates have produced a response to a question, examiners employ a variety of next moves. These are either to: i) move onto the next topic question from the script/frame; or ii) demonstrate to the candidate they expect more of a response, which usually involves particular uses of back channels; or iii) employ a device to seek clarification or expansion on the candidate’s response.

In a similar way to turn-taking, sequence and repair, topic is standardised in furtherance of the institutional goal. In the data, management of topic is almost entirely determined by the examiner’s script and how this script is interactionally implemented throughout each individual interview. There are asymmetrical rights to topic management between the examiner and candidate. These characteristics are directly related to the institutional goal of ensuring validity in the assessment of English speaking proficiency. In the Speaking Test, there is an archetypal organisation which
combines turn-taking, adjacency pair and topic, as follows. All examiner questions (with the exception of the administrative questions) contain two components: a) an adjacency pair component, which requires the candidate to provide an answer; and b) a topic component, which requires the candidate to develop a specific topic. We call this organisation a ‘topic-based Q-A adjacency pair’. So in the Speaking Test, unlike in conversation, topic is always introduced by means of a question. To obtain a high score, candidates need to do the following: a) understand the question they have been asked; b) provide an answer to the question; c) identify the topic inherent in the question; and d) develop the topic inherent in the question. So in the Speaking Test, topic is scripted and entwined with the organisations of turn-taking and sequence in order to ensure standardisation.

In Part 1, candidates answer general questions about a range of familiar topic areas; it is a succession of topic-based question-answer adjacency pairs. In Part 2 (Individual long turn), the candidate is asked to talk on a particular topic and the examiner listens without speaking. The examiner may ask one or two scripted rounding-off questions related to the topic when the candidate has finished talking. Part 3 differs from part 1 in the following ways: there are more abstract and challenging questions and there are no scripted boundary markers for examiners. Although Part 3 is termed ‘two-way discussion’, it is almost identical to Part 1 interactationally, in that it consists of a series of topic-based question-answer adjacency pairs. There are hardly ever any opportunities for candidate to introduce or shift topic and they are generally closed down when they try to do so.

The characteristics of high scoring and low scoring tests in relation to topic are as follows. Candidates at the higher end of the scoring scale tend to have more instances of extended turns in which topic is developed in Parts 1 and 3. There is some evidence that very weak candidates produce short turns with lengthy pauses in Part 2. There are fewer instances of topic trouble in the higher scoring candidates and more in the lower scoring candidates. Candidates gain high scores by engaging with the topic, by expanding beyond minimal information and by providing multiple examples which enable the examiner to develop the topic further. Candidates with low scores sometimes struggle to construct an argument and a coherent answer. High-scoring candidates develop the topic coherently, using markers to connect clauses. Candidates with a high score may develop topic using lexical items which are less common and which portray them as having a higher level of education and social status. Candidates who achieved a very high score typically developed topics that constructed the identity of an intellectual and a (future) high-achiever on the international stage. By contrast, candidates with low scores developed topics in a way that portrayed them as somebody with modest and often localised aspirations. Examiners may take the following features of monologic topic development into account in Part 2: is the question answered; is the topic focus clear or not; is there movement from topic to topic and/or sub-topic; is such movement stepwise, motivated and flowing, or not; is topic development coherent or not; do candidates mark topic/sub-topic shift clearly or not; and for what length of time is the topic developed?

In general, the dataset revealed that there is very little variation in the interaction style of examiners. In cases where there is some variation in the interactional style of examiners, the factors that seem most relevant are: topic shift markers and their use; interruptions to keep candidates on-script or on-topic; use of backchannels; support in repair; deviations from the script; use of follow-up questions; and use of evaluation. Examiners rarely diverge from the brief in the corpus. In the current data, a number of candidates encountered trouble in relation to a series of questions about their names. In Part 3, there is some evidence that even top-level students find some questions intellectually challenging and problematic. Problematic questions may involve an unmotivated shift in perspective, may require specialist knowledge or experience which may not be available to most candidates, or may be puzzling in some way.
4.2 Implications and recommendations

The study employed Richards and Seedhouse’s (2005) model of “description leading to informed action” in relation to applications of CA. Here, the recommendations, which have emerged from analysis of the data, are summarised for test design and examiner training. The logic of the Speaking Test is to ensure validity by standardisation of examiner talk. Therefore, some of these recommendations serve to increase standardisation of examiner conduct and, therefore, equality of opportunity for candidates. Proposals are also made in relation to Part 3, which currently does not generate two-way discussion as planned.

1. Scripted follow-up questions, Part 1 and Part 2
   In the case of Part 1 questions and Part 2 rounding-off questions which may be answered with yes or no, a follow-up question should always be scripted; this is not always the case at present. If they are not followed up, candidates do not have the opportunity to display their ability to develop a topic. It is further recommended that examiners should always ask scripted why/why not? follow-up questions (provided they cohere with the flow of the conversation) as otherwise the candidates may not develop that particular topic.

2. Examples of how examiner behaviour can compromise test validity
   Although the vast majority of examiners do follow instructions and briefs, some occasionally do not, as noted above. The evidence from the data is that it is important that they should, since they may otherwise give an advantage or disadvantage to some candidates. Examiner training could include examples from the data of examiners failing to follow instructions with respect to repair, repetition, explaining vocabulary, assisting candidates, follow-up questions and evaluation. These examples would demonstrate how this can compromise test validity.

3. Explicit marking of topic shifts
   It is recommended that topic shifts should be marked by examiners as explicitly as possible, particularly in the case of questions involving a shift of perspective. Unmotivated and unprepared shifts in perspective may cause confusion for the candidates. At present, in Part 3, topic shifts are not scripted and are often not employed by examiners.

4. Unscripted follow-up questions in Part 3
   The ‘Instructions for IELTS Examiners’ state that examiners may ask unscripted follow-up questions in Part 3; however, they do so relatively rarely. It is recommended that examiners should be encouraged to ask unscripted follow-up questions in Part 3.

5. Encourage candidates to display their ability to engage with a topic
   All examiner questions (with the exception of the administrative questions) contain two components: a) an adjacency pair component, which requires the candidate to provide an answer; and b) a topic component, which requires the candidate to develop a specific topic. To obtain a high score, candidates need to do the following: a) understand the question they have been asked; b) provide an answer to the question; c) identify the topic inherent in the question; and d) develop the topic inherent in the question. This has implications for test item design, examiner training, teaching materials design and candidate preparation. In terms of teaching materials design and candidate preparation, it needs to be made clear to candidates that questions are not just to be answered; they are opportunities for students to display their ability to engage with a topic. In the data, however, this does not appear to be clear to all candidates, particularly lower-scoring ones.
6. Introduce a new Part 4 for candidates to develop topic in a two-way discussion

Taking an overview of topic development in the Speaking Test as a whole, a problem is that it is almost entirely one-sided. Candidates have little or no opportunity to display their ability to introduce and manage topic development, ask questions or manage turn-taking. The clear empirical evidence is that Part 3 currently does not generate two-way discussion as was originally envisaged. The authors’ recommendation is to add a very short Part 4 after the end of Part 3, which might last for two minutes. This part would specifically avoid the examiner asking any questions at all. Rather, the candidate would have the opportunity to lead a discussion and to ask the examiner topic-related questions. Part 4 could start in a number of ways. The examiner could introduce a topic by making an observation which the candidate can then follow up by asking a question. The observation would be related to topics previously discussed, eg ‘I went to see a film last week’ or ‘I went to France last year on holiday’. The candidate would ask questions about this and take on the development of the topic. Alternatively, the candidate could be instructed to ask the examiner questions about topics previously discussed, or could be allowed to introduce a topic of their own choice.

Such a Part 4 would give candidates the chance to take a more active role and to develop topic in a different way. It would also allow a part of the Speaking Test to have a closer correspondence with interaction in university small-group settings, in which students are encouraged to ask questions and develop topics. If adopted, this additional section should be trialled and the interaction analysed to establish whether it does resemble two-way interaction or not.
REFERENCES

Note: The following publications are not referenced as they are confidential and not publicly available:

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- IELTS Examiner Training Material, 2001


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Stokoe, E, 2000, ‘Constructing topicality in university students’ small-group discussion: a conversation analytic approach’ in *Language and Education*, 143, pp 184-203


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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
- word 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

- ja ((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: SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT: A LOW TEST SCORE OF 4.0

002381 132 4.0 3.0 4.0

Part 1

E: well i'm ((name omitted)) (0.6) can you tell me your full name please
C: erm (0.2) my full name is (0.3) ((name omitted)) (0.5) yeah
E: and what would you like me to call you.
C: er (.) ((name omitted))
E: ((name omitted))
C: ((name omitted)) yeah
E: ((name omitted)) or ((name omitted))
C: ((name omitted))
E: ((name omitted)) thanks very much (1) can i have a look at=
C: [fine]
E: =your identification please (5.7) m:: ! hm (3.3) thank you very much (0.6) now ((name omitted)) in this first part i'd like to ask you some questions about yourself (1.6) er do you work or are you a student.
C: er (.) yeah
E: do you work? (0.2) do you have a job[::b?]
C: [yeah] (0.2) i have got part time job.
E: okay (0.3) tell me about the job what is it.
C: er it's (0.3) housekeeping
E: ah[::]
C: [m::]:: (0.3) i work in (0.9) cambridge around the hotel.
E: okay
C: "yeah"
E: and (1.2) er:: what do you do in the job.
C: jus m hm make a bed and (.) clean the bathroom m:: do some dusting
E: yeah=
C: =something like that [hhhe]
E: [yeah] (.) yeah=
Paul Seedhouse and Andrew Harris

C: is quite easy
E: tell me about your working hours
C: eight hour a week
E: m hm
C: just during the weekend
E: [m:::] just on weekends=
C: [m:::] yeah
E: are you happy [with] that work
C: [yeah]
E: yeah is- i very interesting in the wor-
C: "okay" let's go on? and let's talk about sport
C: yeah? oh that's great
E: how interested are you in sport.
C: m:: i like playing badminton
E: m m hm
C: this is quite popular in china
E: it's quite popular there
C: yeah in my spare time o- i always play with my family or with my friend
E: [u hu] did you do sport
C: when you were at school.
C: m:: yeah
E: badminton.
C: yeah
E: .hmmm and do you think that children should be encouraged to do sport.
C: yeah sports. (0.7) good for children.
E: erm (1.9) today o- a lot of children just
(0.7) sitting on:: in front of the internet or television i think it's not very good
they should have many free time to go to outside
E: m::=
C: =in the (tai pa-) i in the:: (1) sports

Topic development in the IELTS Speaking Test

E: yeah (0.3) so they should be encouraged
(0.2)
C: yeah
(.

E: let’s go on and let’s talk about holidays. (0.2) ((name omitted))
(0.3)
C: oh.
(0.3)
E: where do you usually spend your holidays.
(0.5)
C: m::: (0.3) spend (0.2) travel. hhh
(0.8)
E: travelling in [in ] china
C: [yeah]
(2.1)
E: in china
(0.2)
E: m hm (.) m hm (0.7) what kind of things do you like to do on
holidays.
(1.5)
C: m::: (1.5) travelling with my:: (0.7) family.
(0.2)
E: uhu (1.7) where would you:: (. ) particularly like to visit
(0.3) on the next holiday.
(1.3)
C: m::: i will go with china every:: (1.3) i’m going to hong kong
(0.3)
E: oh::?
(0.8)
C: i will go with china every:: (1.3) i’m going to hong kong
(0.3)
E: do you think that you will travel more in the future
(0.4)
E: when you’re older.
(0.3)
E: yeah
(0.5)
E: because you enjoy it (0.9) ok now ((name omitted)) in this
part (0.7) i’m going to give you a topic that i’d like you to
talk about for one to two minutes (0.3) and before you talk
you’ll have one minute to think about what you want to say::
(0.6) you can make some notes if you like (. ) do you
understand?
(0.4)
C: yeah.
(0.3)
E: good (0.5) i have paper there
(0.2)
C: m::=
E: and a pencil for making notes? (0.7) and you– (. ) i’d like you
to describe (2.4) er (0.2) a job that you think would be
interesting=
C: m::?
(0.3)
E: for your future
Part 2

168 E: "okay ((name omitted))" (0.5) now remember you have one to
two minutes for this part so don’t worry (0.3) if i stop you
and i will tell you when it’s (0.7) er the time is up=can you
start speaking now please:=
173 C: =okay fine (0.7) m::: (0.8) i want to be a (. ) accountant in
the future (0.5) .hh because i very interesting:: (0.5) i:n
this subject (0.8) m::: i think (0.4) my parents (1.4) m:::
(0.7) inf- (0.9) in:: (0.4) fluence (0.6) influence (1.5) m:::e
(0.2) because my father::: (0.7) m::: he has a business man
(0.4) and my mother::: was a:: (0.2) professional c- eh
(0.5) accountant (0.6) so when i (0.2) was r- (0.3) was a key
.hhhh m::: (1.4) i (1.7) was very interesting (1.1) in the
(0.5) ((inaudible)) (statement) (0.7) "uh" (0.4) sometimes (0.5)
sometimes (. ) i .hhhh (. ) i would like to calcul- the:: (0.7)
number in the statement (1.4) .hhh an (0.7) i was (0.5) when i
was very young (0.3) .hhh i ca::n:: (0.7) (come to my money)
(0.2) .hhhh (0.2) er::: (3.2) i ca::n (1.3) i always (0.6) went
to bed (0.5) an:: (0.3) saving my money what (.) my parents
gave- (0.5) to me: (0.7) err::: (1.2) an (6.3) i have to: do:::
sr:ome (0.7) .hhhh i think i have to do some (0.9) i think i
have t- t- to do some er (0.7) balance sheet in my future work
(0.2) hu- (0.9) and (0.7) those erm (1.5) profit and loss
account
191 E: (0.2)
193 C: m::: m hm
194 (1.4)
195 C: m::: (2.3) i also want to:: (0.5) er::: (0.3) be a:: (0.7) (isis
(0.5) c a professional) hhhe
196 (0.4)
197 E: ri:::ght.
198 (0.3)
199 C: i think it’s quite difficult for me but i will
200 (0.2)
201 E: yes
202 (0.4)
203 C: work hard
204 (0.6)
205 E: thank you
206 (0.2)
207 C: in the future.
208 (.)
209 E: do you think you would be good at this job.
210 (2.1)
211 C: m: (0.5) yeah
212 (0.4)
213 E: you think you have the skills and you can develop those
214 skills :
215 C: [yeah] i would “do” “any”
216 (.)
217 E: okay i’m going to take your task sheet back (0.5) but we will
go on talking about jobs
218 (0.3)
219 C: ‘yeah”
220 (0.6)
222 E: erm (0.8) can you tell me the the main sort of jobs people do
in your home town and around that place in China.

Part 3

225 C: m::: (2.4) in my country. (2.3) er:: om- (1.7) most of people doing:: (0.7) business
226 E: m hm (0.2) m hm
227 C: m::: (0.6) for example the::: (0.6) tourism training
228 E: m hm=
229 C: =er trading (0.9) an::: (1.5) some (0.5) international trading
230 (1.1)
231 C: erm::: (3.4) small- (0.5) business
232 E: m:::
233 C: and things
234 (0.4)
235 E: are there some jobs (0.5) in your hometown that are popular with men and other jobs that are popular with women?
236 (1.7)
237 C: yeah (0.4) for example the m:: (0.2) teacher:: (0.7) erm (3.4)
238 E: =m hm
239 C: small business
240 (0.2)
241 E: and things
242 C: people
243 (.)
244 E: m hm
245 C: the company will (1.2) prefer (0.8) employ a::: (0.2) woman=
246 E: =m hm
247 C: er for example the (0.2) engineering (0.4) .hhh erm (1.7) the (2.5) better (0.8) ((inaudible)) (0.5) er work they prefer employ men
248 (0.3)
249 E: yes (0.2) [now d] you think that this is going to=
250 C: [((inaudible))] [((inaudible))] [((inaudible))]
251 E: =change in the future. (0.4) in China. (0.3) will the balance of men and women on some jobs change.
252 (1.5)
253 C: er (1.7) yeah it’s (2) going i think it’s going to change because (0.4) more and more men want to become a teacher (0.8) and (0.3) do:: any
254 (2.7)
255 E: and do=
256 C: =job (.) yeah
257 (0.2)
258 E: do more [women want to become engineers]
259 C: [an::: want to becom]:::e engineers [and ]
260 (m hm)
261 C: (0.2)
262 (0.3)

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E: right (3) do you think in the future there will be a need for
more education to get any job.

C: hhh (0.8) hhh yeah (1.5) now the (0.2) eh (2.5) "m" (0.7)
qualification more and more popular in (1.2) china. (2) the
employer er (1.7) do the (0.6) inter the view for (2) the
((inaudible)) (0.7) they first (0.4) er (0.6) n- (1.8)
look your (0.8) which (0.3) er quali- (0.5) cation you (.)
have got

E: right (0.3) it’s becoming more important=thank you ((name
omitted)) (0.4) that’s the end of your speaking exam
APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT: A HIGH TEST SCORE OF 9.0

132 135 9.0 9.0 9.0

Part 1

e: thank you very much for coming here? (0.5) er my name is (name omitted) (0.7) er (0.3) first of all can you give me your full name please.=
e: =erm my full name is (name omitted) (0.9)
e: ¿ok¿ay (0.7) d’ya have a nickname?
e: yeah (name omitted) (1.2) (name omitted) (0.2) [(name omitted)]
e: [(name omitted)]

c: (0.3) right okay .hhh (.) alright erm (0.2) we’re just gonna start by ern (0.7) asking you oh sorry I’ll just have a quick look at your id aswell ["just to"] (0.5) yeah okay .hhhhhh=

c: [("sure")]
e: =e:rm (0.3) gonna start by asking you er (.) a few questions about yourself ern let’s talk about (0.7) what you do. (0.3) do you work or are you a student.=
c: =we:ll:: i’m:: a student at the moment and i work part time? (0.6)
e: right ¿so (0.9) can you tell me about your study first

c: [e:rm] my major is british american studies? at thammasat university? .hh (0.4) [a:n] basically=

e: [right]
c: =what we do is we study:: (0.8) the essential core of british and american:: (0.7) society? culture politics literature?

e: (0.2) [dep ]ends on:: what you wanna major in.

e: [m hm]

c: (.)
e: m hm

c: so::: "that’s"=
e: =okay. (0.3) and which part of your studies do you like (0.5) er the most.

c: e::rm:::. (0.4) probably history and politics?

e: (0.2)

e: yeah

c: yeah i find those two very fascinating:.

e: (.)

e: yeah?

c: a::n um al¡so literature.

e: (0.4)

e: u hu=

c: =i love it in literature i- i like reading (0.6) lots of novels and books "and".

c: (0.3)
e: yeah

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51  C:  yeah
52  (0.3)
53  E:  so what kind of (0.3) er (.) writers "are you- (0.2) do you
54  like".
55  (0.3)
56  C:  erm i like contemporary. (0.2) er i:: (.) i was forced to read
57  a lot of (.). u::m: (1.5) i can't remember the author's name (.).
58  a lot of the- eighteenth century:: british writers (.). [hhh]=
59  [u hu]
60  C:  =and some\ how when you’re forced to read something like that
61  (.). you kind of (0.3) don't want to read it anymore. out of
62  shear force [of ]=
63  E:  [m::: ]
64  C:  =.hhh i- tend to stick with contemporary writers (0.2) but
65  (0.5) mostly my books are from asia books so.
66  (0.2)
67  E:  m::: (0.3) okay .hhh all\ right (0.3) and erm::: (0.4) what- what
68  kind of (0.5) work or what kind of career d'ya (.) d'ya hope to
69  do in the future.
70  (0.3)
71  C:  um what i hope to do is (0.3) either (.) between diplomatic
72  studies? (0.2) or: (.) something like (.). er policy::: (0.6)
73  po- policy formulation in terms of development studies or
74  environmental studies.
75  (1.2)
76  E:  "right okay" .hhh er::: (0.5) i'm gonna change the subject now=
77  C:  =okay?=  
78  E:  =and er::: (0.3) gonna talk about erm (0.5) sport (0.4) erm (.)
79  <how (0.5) are you in sport.>
80  (.)
81  C:  how intre- well:: i did a lot of sports when i was young. I did
82  gymnastics i did swimming um:: (0.4) volleyball (.) .hhh (.).
83  erm netball (.) .hhh but erm at the moment i can't exercise
84  outdoors because i'm allergic to my ow::n um sweat (0.5) and
85  the su::n
86  (0.3)
87  E:  [oh]
88  C:  [so] the only sport i can do is swim
89  (0.4)
90  E:  right (0.2) okay (.). hhh er:::m (1.5) <are most people
91  interested in sport in erm. (1) here in bangkok> d'you think?
92  (0.6)
93  C:  UM i think with- (.). most people in thailand the- the problem
94  with sport here is we don't have the facilities? (0.9) i think
95  people are interested (.). a lot of people play soccer which is
96  easy you can play basically anywhere with either leather ball
97  or plastic? (.). .hhhh but for other recreational sp- erm:::
98  sporting:: (0.4) activities like (0.2) maybe swimming
99  gymnastics or- (0.2) more advanced (0.3) those that require
100  equipment (.). hhh that's (0.2) quite difficult for thai people
101  because they don't have the equipment the facilitites the
102  support (.). hhh the:: (.) places where they can exercise
103  (0.2)
104  E:  m::: (0.5) ok\lay (.). hhhhh er:::m (1.5) <do you think
105  children.> should be encouraged to sp- to take an interest in
106  sport.
107  (0.6)
i think it should (.) sport is good because (0.2) not only-  
(0.3) not only does it promote (.) erm (0.2) .hh social:: (.)  
how d'y call it (0.2) erm::: (1.2) social gathering between  
children because they have to learn to win and loose at the  
same [time ] and that’s- (0.7) i think that’s what y’gain=  
E: ["right"]  
C: =from sport it’s tea::m work (.) .hhhh and it’s good exercise  
they need exercise and (the will) to grow.  
E: m:::. (0.6) okay .hhh er:::m (0.2) l- let’s:: er let’s move  
onto something else let’s talk about clothes .hh (.) and  
fashion are you interested in fashion.  
E: =my fashion an::d- (0.3) the next person’s fashion is: (0.3)  
different.  
C: so i do whatever::. (0. ) i wear whatever makes me comfortable  
an-  
E: right (0.3) okay .hhh an::: (0.2) er (.) so. d’y enjoy  
shopping for clothes?  
C: not really (0.6) it’s::: (1) it’s difficult especially living  
in thailand the:::- [the] people are so small:: and [y’kn]ow  
E: [m:::] [m:::]  
C: they don’t really have the size that fit you  
E: m:::  
C: an i don’t enjoy shopping here because it makes me depress:::  
E: m::=  
C: hhhhh= ((loud sigh))  
E: =okay .hhh alright we’re gonna move on now to::: erm .hh (0.2)  
er the next part of the- the- the test >’alright< i’m gonna  
give you a topic (.) .hhh and i’d like you::: (0.3) to <speak on  
this topic (0.6) for one (0.5) to two minutes> (0.5) er:::  
(2.9) before you speak (0.5) you’ll have one minute (0.4) to  
think about what you are going to say. (0.5) and you can make  
some notes if you wish: (0.2) you understand?=  
C: =okay  
E: okay .hhh now you’ve got a pad and a pen that you can use there  
to make some notes if you want to (0.3) .hhh <and (0.4) here  
(0.3) is your ↑topic> (0.2) .hhhh i’d <like you to describe
your favourite room in the home.> (0.3) okay? so you’ve got a minute to think about that [inaudible] 

C: [can i ask you a] question n::o::iw (0.3) 

E: sure.= (0.3) 

C: =the (.) room i’m supposed to describe does it have to be:: (.) a room that i’m- (0.3) a play- â- (0.2) lived in::? (1) 

E: s::’up t’you [it could be] any room (0.2) 

C: [okay sure ] Part 2 

E: °okay (0.2) you ready?= (0.2) 

C: =yeah (0.2) 

E: erm (1.3) remember that you have one’t’two mintues f’this (0.2) 

C: okay= (0.2) 

E: =don’t worry if i stop you= (0.2) 

C: =i’ka[y:] (0.2) 

E: =i’ll tell you when the time is up (0.2) 

C: okay= (0.2) 

E: =okay (0.2) 

C: okay (0.3) my favourite room is (0.2) <the li:ving: room> because it’s a family room (.). hhhh it’s got a:: very comfortable couch it’s a room where i can::: shar:e (0.2) the space with everybody. (0.6) um::: he.hh (0.7) probably my most- (.). the favourite- (.). my most favourite element about the room is the couch it’s (0.5) bi::g (0.5) it’s got lots of pillows (0.2) hhh and (0.3) you can basically jump on it erm lie on it do whatever on it and it’s- (0.5) it’s still there it won’t break i’ve (0.2) done it many times (.). hhhh erm (0.5) the reason why i like the living room is because. i can go there (.). whenever i’m stressed out (0.3) hh (.). the first thing i see when i step into my house is the living room. (0.6) hh which- (0.2) 

C: .hhhh er (.). it’s- (0.2) the weather’s nice an::d u::m (0.3) it’s got a television where you can do- (0.2) you can sleep you can relax (1.3) you can walk around=it’s close to the kitchen .hhhh it’s close to the bathroom .hhhhh an::d um::: (.) it’s (0.5) i can step outside whenever i need a fresh air::? (0.7) .hh a breath of fresh air .hhhh er ↑um (1.7) basically (0.3) do i want to change anything in the living room? (0.3) nothing (0.4) er i bought the couch myself so (0.5) all the furniture in the (.). living room i- (0.3) i bought and i selected it myself i decorated with my mother so i’m pretty satisfied with how i:: (0.4) <arra:nged the roo::m> (0.7) erm (0.5) as (0.2) ?maybe a bigger television would be
good but that's a different story. (0.7) hh erm (1) tch .hh er
how is it decorated. .hhh <<it's got:::>> (0.4) >well it's got
four walls it's got< two paintings which i bought from
sou'africa? (0.2) .hh from a <<pain|te::r>> er:::i:::i:::. (0.4)
>on our trip< from our trip back from cape town (0.5) .hh and
it w's:: (0.7) it's massive its like (0.3) .hhh a metre and a
half (0.3) wide (0.3) .hhh and erm it's:: got flowers on
flowers which i think really lights up the room and my um:: (.)
my sister? (0.3) she:: (0.4) with the painting we have a buffet
table (.). hh infront of the painting (0.2) .hh she decorated
with (.) um sunflowers (0.5) fake su(h)e)flowers in a:: bath
that she made herself (0.3) which (0.4) probably:: linked up
with the:: the picture and i ↑↑thought y'know it's very cute
an it's very:: (0.5) it's very (ho)mey) like (0.2) you feel
like you wanna relax you feel like your at ho::me you feel
like- (0.5) you can enjoy the space with everybody::. (1.5) at
first i w's gonna say bedroom. but i just thought na: living
room's much because i like it and everybody.
(0.7)
E: okay:: alright (0.2) and er:m (0.3) i take it spend a lot of
time in this room (0.3) yeah?
(.)
C: yeah .hh hhhe=
E: =okay? alright thanks i'll just take the card back. (0.3)
allright been talking about <your favourite room.> an i'd just-
(0.5) <like to:::>> (0.4) erm discuss with you one or two more:::
(0.3) general questions related to this subject. (0.5) .hh er
let's talk about (0.5) erm (0.) <the per:fec: home.> (0.)
<can you descri::be to me the main features.>> (0.) <you would
look for in your per:fec: ho:m::e.>

Part 3

240
241 C: my per:fec: ho:m::e. (1) a good view?
(0.6)
242 E: "m:: hm::"?
243 (0.5)
244 C: u:::i::: ((2.2) com:fortabl::e? (1.5) something that i (.) walk
in and i feel like (0.4) not too bi:::g not too smal:: (.) my
per:fec: home would per:haps have to depend on a lot of
things.=my income?==my::: (.)
249 E: ="m::: hm::":
250 C: =the family at: (0.2) the::: >my situationn< when
249 i'm loo|king:: (.) for that house (0.5) but at:: the moment my
250 perfect home would be the view? (0.5) the room:::ms? (.) erm
251 (0.9) the::: (.) the kitchen? (0.4) er:: the toi:lets? the
252 bathroo:::ms?=
253 E: ="m hm"
254 (0.3)
255 C: an:::d probably? the furnishing=how i can decorate the room and
how i can make that more: (.) more of my::: my: home
256 (0.7)
257 E: =m:::=
258 C: =and the garden hhh
260 (0.5)
261 E: okay .hh er:: (.) can you compare the advatages of living in
older. (0.3) or more modern accommodation.

C: erm of either older? (.) or more modern? . hhhh (0.3) i think 

hhh (0.2) i would go with the more modern with older homes: hh 

(0.5) it's:: difficult to look after:: although- (0.2) 

has lot's of- (0.4) probably lots of meaning and lots of 

memories for (0.2) the person or: ur:: maybe yourself (0.6) 

.hhh it- (0.2) takes a lot of time an:: (.) some?:how (0.4) 

although- (0.6) older homes doesn't- (.) always suit what you 

want 

(0.5) 

E: "m:::"=

C: =you have to change it according to:: (0.2) to your lifestyle 

but with modern homes somehow . hhh you can:: (1.2) almost like 

design:: what you want. (. ) what you expect out of the house 

(0.2) . hhh you <can::: say maybe::: > (0.2) you have a large 

family::: but then you started of with a small family=you can 

extend your family rooms? (0.2) . hh but with (0.2) older homes 

it tends to limit you::=as to how much you can put in an::: 

(0.2) how you can change (0.3) the style of- of living you have 

to adapt yourself to the home rather than:: (0.5) the home 

adapting::: itself to you:::

(0.5) 

E: okay i think w- w- we'll stop there thank you very much