

## 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 Casey, 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 boundary 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 LPs 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 boundary 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 LPs with ordinary conversation, (such as Lazaraton, 2002) have demonstrated that LPs 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 LPs, 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 LPs 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 LPs 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  
 126            er (0.4) they still need to learn english  
 127            (0.5)  
 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  
 (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)

## Extract 5

412 C: =i'm just a simple (0.7) person i wanted to live a simple life.  
 413 (0.2)  
 414 E: → i see (.) and are there a lot of people like you?  
 415 (1.1)  
 416 C: pardon me?  
 417 (.)  
 418 E: are there a lot of people with the same ide[as?]  
 419 C: [ah ] yes yes er one  
 420 of my friends (0.4) she is now:: (0.3) she has a family?  
 (7741t133)

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  
 123 learning english (0.2) since kindergarten (0.7) erm (0.2) and  
 124 (0.7) and erm (1) they learn english continuously erm (0.5) when  
 125 they progress to secondary school or or even university they they  
 126 er (0.4) they still need to learn english  
 127 (0.5)  
 128 E: → why did you choose to learn english and not another language  
 129 (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  
 42 about the apartment.  
 43 (0.6)  
 44 C: er the apartment is (.) very comfortable=  
 45 E: =m hm=  
 46 C: =because it has (0.5) two back doors  
 47 (.)  
 48 E: → m hm=  
 49 C: =which is er (0.3) overlooking the gardens i've m↑a::↓de  
 50 (0.2)  
 51 E: → m hm  
 52 (0.3)  
 53 C: and er it has erm (0.3) good (exit? m: it comes there if there  
 54 is) a f↑i↓re  
 55 (0.4)  
 56 E: → m ↑hm  
 57 (0.3)  
 58 C: and er it's co- convenient for:: (.) cooking:: (0.6) for



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  
 191 more nowadays>  
 192 (0.5)  
 193 E: → °why d'you think that (0.3) is::°  
 194 (0.7)  
 195 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 yea::rs  
 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: i: wi- will only (0.4) buy it  
 271 when i (0.6) belie::ve 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: becau::se (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- ] how does that make life more=  
 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 mor::e in the future  
 143 (0.4)  
 144 C: → y[eah]  
 145 E: [whe]n 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  
 150 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  
 10 where you're from  
 11 (0.7)  
 12 C: i'm originally from the philippines (.) but for the la::st erm  
 13 (0.3) it's like this before i came to canada in the year two  
 14 thousand i was working in thailand. (0.5) for three years for  
 15 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 (.)  
 (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

118           let’s talk about public and private transport (0.6) can you  
119           describe (.) the public transport systems in your country (1.0)  
120    C:       I used to have eh the main eh (2.0) public transport and th-  
121           (0.3) the main transport which are (0.3) which is used by the  
122           public are the (0.5) buses (0.7) secondly if eh (0.3) there are  
123           some urgent eh they use the taxis investment plans the banks  
124           are (.) given the (0.5) the (1.8) transport is eh (1.5) is eh  
125           bad (0.7) today have eh (0.9) can’t I talk about the (0.3)  
126           → problems  
127           (1.1)  
128    E:       → no=  
129    C:       =no (1.1)  
130    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

90    E:       ((inaudible)) (0.4) okay let’s talk about a little bit about  
91       sports (0.5) er how interested are you in sports.  
92       (0.5)  
93    C:       not a lo- haha[hahaha i hehehe]  
94    E:       [hahaha why not ]  
95       (0.5)  
96    E:       why not  
97       (0.3)  
98    C:       WHY NOT? BECAUSE erm::: (1.6) ever since i can remember (0.4)  
99       i never excelled in sports.=  
100   E:       =m↑::↓:  
101       (0.3)  
102   C:       it’s always been ar:ts: (0.4) erm (0.8) arts an literature  
103       mostly (.) performing arts sometimes (0.8) er:: and when i  
104       (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  
106       (0.3)  
107   E:       [m hm]  
108   C:       [whic]h i did=



109 E: =m hm  
 110 (0.5)  
 111 C: um (1.2) i went on to college and took er er journalism course=  
 112 E: =m:::  
 113 (0.6)  
 114 C: an::d er:: i did not go (0.3) directly into. (0.2) journalism  
 115 work but what i did was i did public relations for like (0.8) i  
 116 think ten years? (0.5) and that was public relations doing work  
 117 for cultural groups (.) back in the philippines and that's  
 118 how i eventually found my way (0.4) to an international  
 119 organisation in thailand. (0.3) doing (0.5) erm:: short term  
 120 educational courses for: er cultural workers and artists  
 121 (1)  
 122 E: sounds interesting (0.7) okay (0.3) .hh erm::::: (0.2) so  
 123 (0.4) d'you think (.) children should be encouraged to::  
 124 take an interest in sports?  
 (00198T130)

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=  
 6 C: [yeah]  
 7 E: =too p[lease]  
 8 C: [er:::] (0.3) ((name omitted))  
 9 (0.2)  
 10 E: great and this is your i d ↑car::d (1.1) that's fine thank you  
 11 (0.2) you can take tho[se ((inaudible))]  
 12 C: [((inaudible)) ]  
 13 (1)  
 14 E: okay: in this first part i'd just like to ask you some  
 15 questions about yourself  
 16 (.)  
 17 C: yes yes  
 18 (0.2)  
 19 E: er:: do you work or are you a student?  
 (005875)

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↑::↓:s: they are coming all the ti::me. in dubai.  
 358 (0.2)  
 359 E: okay (0.2) thank you i’ll have the er card back please? (1.1)  
 (000334T133)

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

142 E: okay alright i'll i'll er:: (0.3) er d'you erm (0.3) always  
 143 relax in this way d'you always  
 144 (0.6)  
 145 C: (uhu)  
 146 (.)  
 147 E: d'you always relax in the same way watching tv  
 148 (1.1)  
 149 C: i'm sorry?  
 150 (.)  
 151 E: d'you always (0.3) relax in this way  
 152 (0.7)  
 153 C: no: (0.6) and we have another way to relax to  
 154 (0.2)  
 155 E: uhu  
 156 (0.3)  
 157 C: such as ((inaudible))  
 158 (0.3)  
 159 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

165 E: (0.4) can you explain why mo:st people buy newspapers.  
 (6 lines omitted)  
 172 E: how d'you compare (0.2) their reasons for (0.3) buying  
 173 magazines.  
 (9 lines omitted)  
 183 E: ↑can you speculate on how technology for example. (0.6)  
 184 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 plac:e (0.2) to live  
 43 (0.3)  
 44 C: → erm:: (0.3) .hhh (0.6) ↑recommend.  
 45 (.)  
 46 E: m ↑hm

47 (.)  
 48 C: m:::: (1) in my house is (1.9) have a- (0.6) in my h- (0.3) in  
 49 my hou have fours (.) roo[::m ]  
 50 E: [m hm]=  
 51 C: =bedroom (0.5) and is (0.2) two toilets  
 52 (.)  
 53 E: m [hm]  
 54 C: [i ] live with (0.3) i (0.2) i (.) live with mother[::].  
 (00181t130)

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

53 E: what's the area like where you live.  
 54 (0.7)  
 55 C: → area?  
 56 (0.2)  
 57 E: yes what's the area liKe (0.3) where you live  
 58 (2.2)  
 59 C: oh::: hhhh .hhh (1) what's the area like. (1.5) m::: (2.8) just  
 60 a garden hhhe  
 61 (0.4)  
 (002144t130)

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

139 E: °sh t-° ((could be L1)) (0.6) why do you choose certain types of  
 140 foo:d. (1.9) why do you choose to (0.7) certain types of  
 141 foo::d.  
 142 (0.2)  
 143 C: → because i like it (0.2) hhhe .hhh he .hhh  
 144 (0.2)  
 (002144t130)

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::: (.) er::m (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::.  
 150 (2.3)  
 151 C: → i don't know how to say ah (0.2) because (0.7) i'm not (5.5)  
 152 maybe i will- hhh .hhh i (rarely) think (0.5) so::: (1.7) i  
 153 know::: (2.4) ((inaudible)) for me (.) i just (0.7) (i need for  
 154 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.





## Extract 34

204 E: [okay i'll ask] you another  
 205 question (0.5) er:m (0.6) can you compare ideas that architects  
 206 (0.2)and the general public (.) have (0.3) about buildings  
 207 (7.4)  
 208 C: → m:: (1.2) ((inaudible)) (2.7) erm (1.6) i think (0.3) architect  
 209 (0.4) erm (4.3) is person (1.3) °who° (0.3) who (1.7) create the  
 210 building (1.3) ra- erm (1.3) it h- (0.4) i think (4.3) they  
 211 (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 s:tudy first  
 20 wha'd'ya- (.) what'd'you st[udy ].  
 21 C: [e::rm] my major is british american  
 22 studies? at (deleted) university? .hh (0.4) [a:nd ] basically=  
 23 E: [right]  
 24 C: → =what we do is we study:: (0.8) the essential core of british  
 25 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  
 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) o::r (.) something like (.) er policy::: (0.6)  
 73 po- policy formulation in terms of development studies or  
 74 environmental studies.  
 (000132t135)

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.=  
 100 E: =m↑::↓:  
 101 (0.3)  
 102 C: → it's always been ar:ts: (0.4) erm (0.8) arts an literature  
 103 mostly (.) performing arts sometimes (0.8) er::: and when i  
 104 (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]  
 (00181t130)

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: → °°it's local°°  
 26 (0.6)  
 27 E: °°m (0.3) hm:°°  
 28 (7.5)  
 29 E: <what is the area (.) like> where you live  
 (00022t132)

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)

266 medical practitioner (1.6) especially those who:: (0.5) erm  
 267 (1.6) treat er (0.5) very (0.6) common diseases (0.4) not  
 268 specialist (2.2) i think it's (0.3) quite interesting because  
 269 er you- (0.3) you meet a lot of people (1.4) different kinds of  
 270 people (1.1) and er (0.7) people who are having problems (0.3)  
 271 people who are- people who are in pain (0.6) and er (0.7)  
 272 you have to try as much as you can (0.7) to:: make them feel  
 273 better (1.4) or try to solve your problems you cannot solve  
 274 you- you put them in a state that they will feel more at ease  
 275 (0.4) °with with him° (0.9) for example eh somebody (0.3)  
 276 selling ah:: (0.6) let's say::: (0.8) erm::: (2) selling er::  
 277 let's say:: (1.7) MALARIA (0.4) the illness is common in my  
 278 pla::ce (1) okay (0.4) the patients who have this ((inaudible))  
 279 condition erm:: (0.3) vomiting and all (1) this is very:::  
 280 (0.2) ah:: troublesome (0.4) it (makes (0.2) makes you feel  
 281 mistaken) (0.7) (it's all) (.) it's up to the doctor to make  
 282 you relax (0.4) even though your sick nearly won't go away  
 283 (0.8) right after you see the doctor? but (0.7) the doctor must  
 284 try to (0.3) er:: talk you to:: (1.2) er:: feel at ease (0.5)  
 285 jus- (.) just to let you know that okay these are the  
 286 medications i want to give you=these are the things you must do  
 287 (0.8) and er (0.7) hopefully (.) it will work for you (0.8)  
 288 (it's) all:: (0.3) i think that is a very interesting job  
 289 (0.2)  
 290 E: alright. (0.3) thank you  
 (2150t132)

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

175 E: okay (4) ((rustling paper)) there's some paper:: (0.7) and  
 176 pencil? (0.3) for making notes? (0.8) and here's your topic?=i  
 177 would like you to describe your favourite newspaper or  
 178 magazine.  
 179 (0.3)  
 180 C: .hhhh .hhhh (2.5) °((inaudible))°  
 Part 2  
 181 (65)  
 182 E: alright ((name omitted))  
 183 (0.5)  
 184 C: yeah[::]  
 185 E: [re]member you have one to two minutes for this?=so don't  
 186 worry if i stop you? (0.4) i'll tell you when the time is up?  
 187 (.) can you start speaking now? ↑please  
 188 (0.3)  
 189 C: m::: okay. (2) m::: (2) about newspaper or magazine (0.3)  
 190 there are many (0.4) pub- (0.7) of (.) no (.) many kind of

191 article (0.6) er such as (0.3) programs (0.5) (fishing)  
 192 entertainment (0.2) in the national news (0.2) local news (0.5)  
 193 an::: (1) other information about (0.3) er (0.7) television er  
 194 (0.3) er:: or radio (1.2) .hhhh (0.3) um: (0.7) the:: (0.3)  
 195 (the part er most i read is) er ((drops pen)) hhhe (1) is (the  
 196 fashion) (1.7) m:: (0.2) maybe i- (0.2) maybe i like to read  
 197 (0.8) the (fishing) so:: (1.3) er (0.2) every- (0.2) every time  
 198 i:. (.) read the newspaper the first part (0.6) i read is the  
 199 (fishing) (0.7) hhhh (1.4) and what sort (0.3) of (paper) is  
 200 given. (0.7) to er (.) there's may::be:: (0.7) er some business  
 201 man (0.2) an::: (0.7) .hhhh other::: (1.2) because malaysians  
 202 like to (0.5) stay in the restaurant on a saturday (mama chows)  
 203 an or other chinese restaurant (0.5) they have a- the- new-  
 204 newspaper to (0.3) they have time to (0.5) er spending (0.5) er  
 205 (0.5) reading newspaper or magazine (0.7) so (1.3) m:: (1.5)  
 206 but for me (0.5) i like go to the- (0.3) i like go to:: (0.2)  
 207 coffee shops such as (0.3) ((inaudible)) (0.5) or starbuck  
 208 (1.3) or (0.4) another coffee shop (0.9) i read the magazine  
 209 (0.3) er (1.2) in the shop and enjoy:: (.) the coffee (1.4)  
 210 m:: (0.6) but (0.5) erm (1.8) how (0.5) how do i. (0.3) despite  
 211 a vision (0.7) why i (0.5) why i ((inaudible)) (0.4) because  
 212 (1) because (0.2) maybe i- (0.4) i am a- (0. ) i am Chinese  
 213 (1) we are (0.2) we are a lot of (fishing) (0.4) er for  
 214 pr- (0.2) probably tuna fish an: (0.2) we ha- (0.7) i have  
 215 (0.2) read (0.3) a- a- already (0.7) so: (1.8) this may- (0.2)  
 216 this maybe a::: (3.4) maybe a:::.. (0.7) maybe (0.6) maybe  
 217 (0.7) my hobby:: (0.2) so (0.5) i (reckon i read) (0.3) er  
 218 (0.2) i read everyday °and er°  
 219 (1)  
 (002144t130)

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

24 E: thank ↑you (2.4) fine thank you. (0.4) now in this first part  
 25 i'd like to ask you some questions about yourself (0.6) er  
 26 let's talk about what you do=do you work or are you a student.  
 27 (0.3)  
 28 C: i just started a new job last week  
 29 (0.2)  
 30 E: → u hu  
 31 (0.6)  
 32 C: um (.) i work as an administrative assistant for:: er::  
 33 (.) for the ((inaudible)) shopping centre in ((inaudible))  
 34 just only the (bento) retail services?  
 35 (0.2)  
 36 E: → u [hu]  
 37 C: [th]e (bento) group (0. ) [of can]ada=  
 38 E: [oh and]  
 39 E: → =and what do you do in your job  
 40 (0.5)  
 41 C: erm as administrative assistant (0.2) i (.) basically just give  
 42 administrative support to the general manager  
 43 (.)  
 44 E: → m hm  
 45 (0.6)  
 46 C: but it's a small office and everybody pitch in- (.) pitches in  
 47 so. (0.5) erm it's (0.6) it's really (.) teamwork. (0.2)  
 48 you' [know].  
 49 E: → [m::.]  
 50 (0.7)  
 51 C: erm (0.4) provide help (0.3) wherever and whenever you can=  
 52 E: → =m hm

53 (0.3)  
 54 C: like (1) we have: specific duties assigned to us but it  
 55 looks like (0.7) erm everybody's help is always needed  
 56 especially when it comes to say (.) the (inaudible) reports  
 57 that (0.3) have to be turned in to the:: head office by the end  
 58 of each month=  
 (198t130)

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) becaus::e  
 76 (0.3) er::: if i wer:::e (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: [m hm]  
 86 C: =financia[lly:: huh huh .hhh ] (.) but i- (.) we are=  
 87 E: [hu hu hu hu hu hu hu.]  
 87 C: =(inaudible) financially [then:: .hhh we are] kinda having=  
 88 E: [↑m m:: ↑m m:::]  
 89 C: =som::e fi[nancial-]  
 90 E: [↑m:: m:::]:::  
 91 (0.2)  
 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)  
 (07771T132)

*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.

## Extract 45

143 C: with er foreign people (0.3) erm don't be shy? (0.3) just talk  
 144 (0.5) erm (0.4) when you talk you know (0.2) er where is your  
 145 mistake and people will correct you i think (0.3) yeah  
 146 (0.4)  
 147 E: → good advice (0.2)  
 (94 lines omitted)  
 242 C: for those who like to read newspapers just want to (0.3)  
 243 ((inaudible)) (0.3) maybe  
 244 (0.6)  
 245 E: ye::s (0.2) that that sounds reasonable?  
 (33 lines omitted)  
 279 C: isolated from society in gen::eral:: hhe hhe  
 280 (.)  
 281 E: yes that's absolutely right (0.6) erm (0.3) can you talk about  
 (5756t130)

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  
 224 choose (0.3) with those that WOMEN choos:e  
 225 (0.2)  
 226 C: okay that's a tough one .hhh ah [ha ha ha] (0.5) well i guess  
 227 E: [ha ha ha]  
 228 C: (0.4) me::n:: (1.5) like (0.5) >when they do things to  
 229 relax< they (0.3) kind of choose non physical activity i  
 230 fee::l  
 230 (0.3)  
 231 E: m hm=  
 232 C: =more towards sitting around and talking=whereas women (0.7)  
 233 erm i hope i don't s- (0.2) er sound chauvinistic >or anything<  
 234 → but some wo[men ] like (0. ) they like to do house work?  
 235 E: [ha he]  
 236 (0.2)  
 237 E: u ↑hu  
 238 (.)  
 239 C: erm:: (0.6) some women i'm not saying all of them hhh .hhh erm  
 240 (0.6) they like to do things that's physical y'know  
 241 (0.4)  
 242 E: m [hm]  
 243 C: [ma]ybe some women like to do rock climbing or something they  
 244 like to do something physical as opposed to men who like to do  
 245 (0.4) things that's don't require any physical activity  
 246 (0.3)  
 247 E: → m hm (0.4) now where did you get this:: (0.8) n::- this notion  
 248 of women (0.7) d- do you know people who[::]  
 249 C: [NO]::: no:: [no:::]  
 250 E: [or is]  
 251 it just an op- opinion=  
 252 C: =it's just an opinion ↑erm it's not based on anybody. or  
 253 anything? an i=  
 254 E: =u hu



255 (0.2)  
 256 C: an i hope didn't insult [anyone]  
 257 E: [NO↑:: ] no no no i just wan- just  
 256 curious that's all (0.5) okay what would you say are the main  
 257 causes of stress that people experience.  
 (2011t134)

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

381 C: i wanted to have a mor:::e (.) interaction between nature.  
 382 (0.6)  
 383 E: → ah↑:::↓:: that that's the opposite of what i [thought the  
 384 C: [yes yes  
 385 E: answer would] be (0.3) of course this er this erm:: (0.7)  
 386 C: huh huh ]  
 387 E: → speaking test is a (0.3) chance to encourage your opinions your  
 388 [ideas]  
 399 C: [yes ] yep=  
 400 E: → =.hhhh erm (.) i thought .hhh that's what your pa:rents would  
 401 have expected when they were young and i thought your  
 402 expectations would [possibly be]  
 403 C: [y(huh)es .h]hhh since (0.3) erm in  
 404 my[::: pro]vince we live in a:: (0.2) bungalow type of house=  
 405 E: [different]  
 (007741t133)

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

170 E: (0.4) what are the most popular ways that people:: like to  
 171 relax in:: thailand  
 172 (0.6)  
 173 C: °m:::° (1.7) i think er thai people usually (0.6) go out (0.7)  
 174 to a department store  
 175 (0.5)  
 176 E: how say that=  
 177 C: =yes=  
 178 E: → =what er that's shopping therapy is it?  
 179 (0.3)  
 180 C: °m hm° (0.6) eh [heh heh heh i] think so it's shopping=  
 181 E: [what what .hhh huh]  
 182 C: =therapy huh huh=  
 183 E: =hahaha [((inaudible))]  
 184 C: [hah hah hahha]  
 (00246t134)

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::.. (0.3) .hhh em:: (0.2) let's move on to talk about names::
93       (0.2) erm::: can you tell me what your name means
94       (0.7)
95   C:   my name means er sta::r that's what i know:: (0.2) 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 (0.2) for [you:].
100   C:   [chos]en? (0.7) ah well i have no ide::a
101      actually (0.7) but er i've seen from a book that is (0.5) er::
102      from the word estrella (0.2) it means ↓star
103      (.)
104   E:   m:::.. (0.2) d'you like your name?
105      (.)
106   C:   of course i like
107      (0.9)
108   E:   are are names important.
109      (0.7)
110   C: → come again?
111      (0.3)
112   E:   <are na::mes important>
113      (0.4)
114   C:   all names?
115   E:   (0.3) <are:: na::mes (.) important>
116      (0.2)
117   C:   potent?
118      (0.2)

```

119 E: important  
 120 (0.2)  
 121 C: important? (0.2) what do you mean portant.=  
 122 E: =okay (.) .hhh would you ever change? (0.2) your name?  
 123 (0.3)  
 124 C: no:?  
 125 (0.8)  
 126 E: why.  
 127 (0.7)  
 128 C: i love my na::me (0.2) that's wha::t my ma- my parents gave me  
 129 (0.8)  
 (008004t134)

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  
 82 you tell me what your name means::  
 83 (0.5)  
 84 C: → my name is ((name omitted))  
 85 (0.2)  
 86 E: can you tell me what your name mea:ns::.  
 87 (0.2)  
 88 C: my name means love (0.3) ((name omitted)) means love  
 (12 lines omitted)  
 101 E: are names important.  
 102 (0.3)  
 103 C: they're very impor[tant]  
 104 E: [why.]  
 105 (0.3)  
 106 C: → because::e (0.5) they like- (3.7) eh (0.2) things would be  
 107 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 (.) .hh let's move on to talk about na::mes. (0.4) can  
 104 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  
 112 you.  
 113 (0.4)  
 114 C: oh (0.5) and ((name omitted)) is- (.) my name  
 115 (0.2)

116 E: yeah (0.3) what does it mean (0.2) the meaning.  
 117 (0.4)  
 118 C: e:::r:: (1.5) erm because i'm not- (.) born in macau or hong  
 119 ko- i born in (0.9) in (costa rica?) an-  
 120 (0.2)  
 121 E: O:::ka[y y]eah=  
 122 C: [and]  
 123 C: =and (.) the name with my fathe::r (0.4) (it) (0.3) funny::  
 124 (0.2)  
 125 E: → ↑o:::↓kay (0.2) [BUt ] d'you know the meaning?  
 126 C: [m:::]  
 127 (0.2)  
 128 C: → er i don't know the mea[(ning)]  
 129 E: [HU HU:]=  
 (6220t132)

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

380 E: → okay. (.) .hhhhh and finally ((name omitted)) could you  
 381 speculate on any <<fu:tu:re cha:::nge:s:. (.) in the  
 382 relationship between the education and work>>  
 383 (2.8)  
 384 C: °°m:::°° (4.5) °°education and work°° (1.5) we:::ll:::  
 385 (4.5) i THInk (0.6) Er::m (0.7) wa'↑think ho:ng ko:ng i think  
 386 it's more ((inaudible)) (the american syste::m:)? it's [more]=  
 387 E: [m hm]  
 388 C: like (0.3) wider knowledge >instead of-< (0.4) jus- (0.7)  
 389 following? step by ste:p?  
 390 (.)  
 391 E: m hm  
 392 (0.8)  
 393 C: i the'i'just gears (.) people toward like a (0.2) wider range  
 394 of jo:bs? then jus- specifically attacking one?  
 (5698t132)

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

219 E: what about the relationship <between education (.) and (0.3)  
 220 work.> (0.3) how will it change in the future.  
 221 (1.6)  
 222 C: erm:: (0.4) education and work change in the future in a sense  
 223 that? (0.8) erm (2.5) if you need to:: (.) if (.) if (0.4) ye-  
 224 (0.2) th- (.) if there is education. (0.4) it would be very  
 225 (0.4) er::m (0.7) of course you if you are educated (0.4) work  
 226 is very much:: (.) erm at hand (0.3) you know you will always  
 227 get a job. (0.5) if you are educated. (0.5) so without erm  
 228 (0.3) education (0.6) perhaps:: erm (0.5) work will be:: very  
 229 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 interactionally, 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.



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## APPENDIX 1: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

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

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

### Additional symbols

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

**APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT: A LOW TEST SCORE OF 4.0**

002381 132 4.0 3.0 4.0

**Part 1**

1 E: well i'm ((name omitted)) (0.6) can you tell me your full name  
 2 please  
 3 (0.7)  
 4 C: erm (0.2) my full name is (0.3) ((name omitted)) (0.5) yeah  
 5 (0.9)  
 6 E: and what would you like me to call you.  
 7 (0.3)  
 8 C: er (.) ((name omitted))  
 9 (0.4)  
 10 E: ((name omitted))  
 11 (0.3)  
 12 C: yeah  
 13 (0.8)  
 14 E: ((name omitted)) or ((name omitted))  
 15 (0.3)  
 16 C: ((name omitted))  
 17 (.)  
 18 E: ((name omitted)) thanks very [much] (1) can i have a look at=  
 19 C: [fine]  
 20 E: =your identification please (5.7) m:: ↑hm (3.3) thank you very  
 21 much (0.6) now ((name omitted)) in this first part i'd like to  
 22 ask you some questions about yourself (1.6) er do you work or  
 23 are you a student.  
 24 (1.3)  
 25 C: er (.) yeah  
 26 (0.7)  
 27 E: do you work? (0.2) do you have a jo[::b?]  
 28 C: [yeah] (0.2) i have got  
 29 part time job.  
 30 (.)  
 31 E: okay (0.3) tell me about the jo:b what is it.  
 32 (0.4)  
 33 C: er it's (0.3) housekeeping  
 34 (0.2)  
 35 E: ah[::]  
 36 C: [m:]:: (0.3) i work in (0.9) cambridge around the hotel.  
 37 (0.3)  
 38 E: okay  
 39 (0.5)  
 40 C: °yeah°  
 41 (0.4)  
 42 E: and (1.2) er:: what do you do in the job.  
 43 (1)  
 44 C: jus m hm make a bed and (.) clean the bathroom m:: do some  
 45 (0.2) dusting  
 46 (0.2)  
 47 E: yeah=  
 48 C: =something like that [hhhe]  
 49 E: [yeah] (.) yeah=

50 C: =is quite easy  
51 (0.3)  
52 E: tell me about your working hours  
53 (1.7)  
54 C: eight hour a week  
55 (0.3)  
56 E: m hm  
57 (.)  
58 C: just during the weekend  
59 (0.2)  
60 E: [m::.] (0.4) just on weekends=  
61 C: [m::.]  
62 C: =yeah  
63 (.)  
64 E: are you happy (0.2) [with] that work work  
65 C: [yeah]  
66 (0.4)  
67 C: yeah is- (0.2) int- i very interesting in the wor-  
68 (0.3)  
69 E: °okay° (1.5) let's go on? (0.7) and let's talk about (0.6) sport  
70 (0.3)  
71 C: yeah? (0.3) oh that's great  
72 (1)  
73 E: how interested are you in sport.  
74 (1.4)  
75 C: m:: i like (0.5) playing (0.2) badminton  
76 (0.5)  
77 E: m ↑hm  
78 (0.2)  
79 C: m:: this ((inaudible)) is quite popular in china  
80 (0.6)  
81 E: it's quite popular there  
82 (.)  
83 C: yeah (1.3) in my spare time o- (0.4) i always play with my  
84 family or (0.2) with my friend [yeah]  
85 E: [u hu] (0.7) did you do sport  
86 when you were at school.  
87 (1.1)  
88 C: m:: yeah  
89 (0.3)  
90 E: badminton.  
91 (0.2)  
92 C: yeah  
93 (1.6)  
94 E: .hhhh and do you think that children should be encouraged to do  
95 sport.  
96 (1)  
97 C: yeah sports. (0.7) good for children.  
98 (.)  
99 E: m::  
100 (0.2)  
101 C: erm (1.9) erm:: (0.8) today o- (0.3) a lot of children just  
102 (0.7) er::: (.) sitting (0.6) on:: (1.1) in front of the  
103 internet or (0.3) television i think it's not very good (0.2)  
104 they should have (1) m:: (0.7) many (0.3) free time (0.3) to  
105 go to o- (0.4) outside  
106 (0.2)  
107 E: m:::=  
108 C: =in the (tai pa-) (1.5) i (.) in the:: (1) sports  
109 (0.4)

110 E: yeah (0.3) so they should be encouraged  
 111 (0.2)  
 112 C: yeah  
 113 (.)  
 114 E: let's go on and let's talk about ho↑li↓days. (0.2) ((name  
 115 omitted))  
 116 (0.3)  
 117 C: oh.  
 118 (0.3)  
 119 E: where do you usually spend your holidays.  
 120 (0.5)  
 121 C: m:: (0.3) spe::nd (0.2) travel. hhh  
 122 (0.8)  
 123 E: travelling in [in ] china  
 124 C: [yeah]  
 125 (2.1)  
 126 C: in china  
 127 (0.2)  
 128 E: m hm (.) m hm (0.7) what kind of things do you like to do on  
 129 holidays.  
 130 (1.5)  
 131 C: m:: (1.5) travelling with my:: (0.7) family.  
 132 (0.2)  
 133 E: uhu (1.7) where would you:: (.) particularly like to (.) visit  
 134 (0.3) on the next holiday.  
 135 (1.3)  
 136 C: m:: i will go with china every:: (1.3) i'm going to hong kong  
 137 (0.3)  
 138 E: oh::?  
 139 (0.8)  
 140 C: °m:°  
 141 (0.6)  
 142 E: do you think that you will travel mor::e in the future  
 143 (0.4)  
 144 C: y[eah]  
 145 E: [whe]n 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  
 150 part (0.7) i'm: going to give you a topic that i'd like you to  
 151 talk about for one to two minutes (0.3) and before you talk  
 152 you'll have one minute to think about what you want to say::  
 153 (0.6) you can make some notes if you like (.) do you  
 154 understand?  
 155 (0.4)  
 156 C: yeah.  
 157 (0.3)  
 158 E: good (0.5) i have paper there  
 159 (0.2)  
 160 C: m::=  
 162 E: =and a pencil for making notes? (0.7) and y- (.) i'd like you  
 163 to describe (2.4) er (0.2) a job that you think would be  
 164 interesting=  
 165 C: m::?  
 166 (0.3)  
 167 E: for your future

## Part 2

- 168 (60.5)
- 169 E: °okay ((name omitted))° (0.5) erm now remember you have one to  
 170 two minutes for this part so don't worry (0.3) if i stop you  
 171 and i will tell you when it's (0.7) er the time is up=can you  
 172 start speaking now please:=
- 173 C: =okay fine (0.7) m::: (0.8) i want to be a (.) accountant in  
 174 the future (0.5) .hh because i very interesting:: (0.5) i:n  
 175 this subject (0.8) m::: i think (0.4) my parents (1.4) m:::  
 176 (0.7) inf- (0.9) in:: (0.4) fluence (0.6) influence (1.5) m:::e  
 177 (0.2) because my father::: (0.7) m::: he has a business man  
 178 (0.4) and my mother::: was a:: (0.2) professional c- eh  
 179 (0.5) accountant (0.6) so when i (0.2) was r- (0.3) was a key  
 180 .hhhh m::: (1.4) i (1.7) was very interesting (1.1) in the  
 181 (0.5) ((inaudible)) (statement) (0.7) °uh° (0.4) sometimes (0.5)  
 182 sometimes (.) i .hhhh (.) i would like to calcul- the:: (0.7)  
 183 number in the statement (1.4) .hhh an (0.7) i was (0.5) when i  
 184 was very young (0.3) .hhh i ca::n::: (0.7) (come to my money)  
 185 (0.2) .hhhh (0.2) er::: (3.2) i ca::n (1.3) i always (0.6) went  
 186 to bed (0.5) an:: (0.3) saving my money what (.) my parents  
 187 gave- (0.5) to me: (0.7) er::: (1.2) an (6.3) i have to:: do:::  
 188 s::ome (0.7) .hhhh i think i have to do some (0.9) i think i  
 189 have t- t- to do some er (0.7) balance sheet in my future work  
 190 (0.2) hu- (0.9) and (0.7) those erm (1.5) profit and loss  
 191 account  
 192 (0.2)
- 193 E: 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  
 195 (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 ski[lls] ]  
 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  
 218 go on talking about ↑jobs  
 219 (0.3)
- 220 C: °yeah°  
 221 (0.6)
- 222 E: erm (0.8) can you tell me the the main sort of jobs people do



223 in your home town and around that (0.5) place in china. (0.3)  
 224 what kind of things do people do.

**Part 3**

225 (0.6)  
 226 C: m::: (2.4) in m:::y country. (2.3) er:: om- (1.7) most of  
 227 people doing:: (0.7) business  
 228 (0.4)  
 229 E: m hm (0.2) m hm  
 231 C: m::: (0.6) for example the::: (0.6) tourism training  
 232 (0.4)  
 233 E: m hm=  
 234 C: =er trading (0.9) an::: (1.5) some (0.5) international trading  
 235 (1.1)  
 236 C: erm::: (3.4) s:mall- (0.5) business  
 237 (0.2)  
 238 E: m::.  
 239 (.)  
 240 C: and things  
 241 (0.4)  
 242 E: are there some jobs (0.5) in your hometown that are popular  
 243 with men and other jobs that are popular with women?  
 244 (1.7)  
 245 C: yeah (0.4) for example the m::: (0.2) teacher::: (0.7) erm (3.4)  
 246 s::o with er=  
 247 E: =m hm  
 248 (0.2)  
 249 C: people  
 250 (.)  
 251 E: m hm  
 252 (0.8)  
 253 C: the company will (1.2) prefer (0.8) employ a::: (0.2) woman=  
 254 E: =m hm  
 255 (0.6)  
 256 C: er for example the (0.2) engineering (0.4) .hhh erm (1.7) the  
 257 (2.5) better (0.8) ((inaudible)) (0.5) er work they prefer  
 258 employ men  
 259 (0.3)  
 260 E: yes (0.2) [now d]'you think that this is going to=  
 261 C: [((inaudible))]  
 262 E: =change in the future. (0.4) in china. (0.3) will the balance  
 263 of men and women on some jobs change.  
 264 (1.5)  
 265 C: er (1.7) yeah it's (2) going i think it's going to change  
 266 because (0.4) more and more men want to become a teacher (0.8)  
 267 and (0.3) do::: any  
 268 (2.7)  
 269 E: and do=  
 270 C: =job (.) yeah  
 271 (0.2)  
 272 E: do more [women want to become engineers]  
 273 C: [an::: want to becom]:::e engineers [and ]  
 274 E: [m hm]  
 275 (0.2)  
 276 C: business woman  
 277 (0.3)

278 E: right (3) do'you think in the future there will be a need for  
279 more education to get any job.  
280 (0.7)  
281 C: .hhhh (0.8) hhh yeah (1.5) now the::: (0.2) eh:: (2.5) °m° (0.7)  
282 qualification more and more popular in::: (1.2) china. (2) the  
283 employer er::m. (1.7) do the:: (0.6) inter the view for (2) the  
284 ((inaudible)) (0.7) th- they first (0.4) er:: (0.6) n- (1.8)  
285 look your (0.8) which (0.3) er quali- (0.5) cation you:: (.)  
286 have got  
287 (0.2)  
288 E: right (0.3) it's becoming more important=thank you ((name  
289 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

1 E: thank you very much for coming here? (0.5) er my name is (name  
 2 omitted) (0.7) er (0.3) first of a:ll can you give me your full  
 3 name please.=

4 C: =erm my full name is (name omitted)  
 5 (0.9)

6 E: ↓ok↑ay (0.7) d'ya have a nickname?  
 7 (.)

8 C: yeah (name omitted) (1.2) (name omitted) (0.2) [(name omitted)]  
 9 E: [(name omitted)]  
 10 (0.3) right okay .hhh (.) alright erm (0.2) we're just gonna  
 11 start by erm (0.7) a:sking you=oh sorry I'll just have a quick  
 12 look at your id aswell [°just to°] (0.5) yeah okay .hhhhhh=  
 13 C: [°sure° ]

14 E: =e::rm (0.3) gonna start by asking you er (.) a few questions  
 15 about yourself erm let's talk about (0.7) what you do. (0.3)  
 16 do you work or are you a student.=

17 C: =we:ll:: i'm:: a student at the moment and I work part time?  
 18 (0.6)

19 E: right ↑so (0.9) can you tell me about your s:tudy first  
 20 wha'd'ya- (.) what'd'you st[udy ].

21 C: [e::rm] my major is british american  
 22 studies? at thammasat university? .hh (0.4) [a:nd ] basically=  
 23 E: [right]

24 C: =what we do is we study:: (0.8) the essential core of british  
 25 and american:: (0.7) society? culture politics literature?  
 26 (0.2) [dep ]ends on:: what you wanna major in.

27 E: [m hm]  
 28 (.)

29 E: m hm  
 30 (0.2)

31 C: so:: °that's°=  
 32 E: =okay. (0.3) and which part of your studies do you like (0.5)  
 33 er the most.  
 34 (0.2)

35 C: e::rm::.. (0.4) probably history and politics?  
 36 (0.2)

37 E: yeah  
 38 (0.2)

39 C: yeah i find those two very fascinating:.  
 40 (.)

41 E: yeah?  
 42 (.)

43 C: a::nd u:m al↑so literature.  
 44 (0.4)

45 E: u hu=  
 46 C: =i love it in literature i- i like reading (0.6) lots of novels  
 47 and books °and°.  
 48 (0.3)

49 E: yeah  
 50 (.)

- 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 E: [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 al↑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) o::r (.) 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 (1)
- 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↑ay (.) .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)

- 108 C: i think it shou::ld (.) sport is good because (0.2) not only-  
 109 (0.3) not only does it promote (.) erm (0.2) .hh social:: (.)  
 110 how d'you call it (0.2) erm::: (1.2) social gathering between  
 111 children because they have to learn to win and loose at the  
 112 same [time ] and that's- (0.7) i think that's what y'gain=  
 113 E: [°right°]  
 114 C: =from sport it's tea::m↑work (.) .hhhh and it's good exercise  
 115 they need exercise and (the will) to grow.  
 116 (0.2)  
 117 E: m::: (0.6) okay .hhh er:::m (0.2) l- let's:: er let's move  
 118 onto something else let's talk about clothes .hh (.) and  
 119 fashion are you interested in fashion.  
 120 (1)  
 121 C: am i interested in fashion. well not really.  
 122 (0.6)  
 123 E: m hm  
 124 (0.6)  
 125 C: i::: (.) i dress whatever is comfortable. i don't follow the  
 126 fashion trend because i think (.) first of all it's a waste of  
 127 money=and second of all (1) fashion is::: (.) up to the person.  
 128 (.) y'k[no::w]  
 129 E: [m:::]=  
 130 C: =my fashion an::d- (0.3) the next person's fashion is: (0.3)  
 131 different.  
 132 (0.2)  
 133 E: m:::  
 134 (0.3)  
 135 C: so i do whatever::: (0. ) i wear whatever makes me comfortable  
 136 an-  
 137 (0.6)  
 138 E: right (0.3) okay .hhh an::: (0.2) er (.) so. d'you enjoy  
 139 shopping for clothes?  
 140 (0.5)  
 141 C: not really (0.6) it's::: (1) it's difficult especially living  
 142 in thailand the::- [the] people are so small:: and [y'kn]ow  
 143 E: [m::] [m::.]  
 144 (0.6)  
 145 C: they don't really have the size that fit you  
 146 (0.3)  
 147 E: m::  
 148 (.)  
 149 C: an i don't enjoy shopping here because it makes me depress::  
 150 .hhh  
 151 (0.3)  
 152 E: m::=  
 153 C: hhhhh= ((loud sigh))  
 154 E: =okay .hhh alright we're gonna move on now to:: erm .hh (0.2)  
 155 er the next part of the- the- the test >°alright°< i'm gonna  
 156 give you a topic (.) .hhh and i'd like you:: (0.3) to <spea on  
 157 this topic (0.6) fo:r one (0.5) to two minutes> (0.5) er::  
 158 (2.9) before you speak (0.5) you'll have one minute (0.4) to  
 159 think about what you are going to say. (0.5) a:nd you can make  
 160 some notes if you wish: (0.2) you understand?=  
 161 C: =o↑kay  
 162 (0.2)  
 163 E: okay .hhh now you've got a pad and a pen that you can use there  
 164 to make some notes if you want to (0.3) .hhh <and (0.4) here  
 165 (0.3) is your ↑to↓pic> (0.2) .hhhh i'd <like you to describe

166 your favourite room in the home.> (0.3) okay? so you've got a  
 167 minute to think about that [((inaudible)) ]  
 168 C: [can i ask you a] question n↑o::↓w  
 169 (0.3)  
 170 E: sure.=  
 171 C: =the (.) room i'm supposed to describe does it have to be::  
 172 (.) a room that i'm- (.) a play- a- (0.3) a room that i- (0.2)  
 173 lived in::?  
 174 (1)  
 175 E: s::'up t'you [it could be] any room  
 176 C: [okay sure ]

**Part 2**

177 (58)  
 178 E: °okay (0.2) you ready?°=  
 179 C: =yeah  
 180 (0.2)  
 181 E: erm (1.3) remember that you have one't'two mintues f'this  
 182 (.)  
 183 C: okay=  
 184 E: =don't worry if i stop you=  
 185 C: =↑oka[y:]  
 186 E: [i']ll tell you when the time is up  
 187 (0.2)  
 188 C: okay=  
 189 E: =okay  
 190 (1)  
 191 C: okay (0.3) my favourite room is (0.2) <the li:ving: room>  
 192 becau:se it's a family ↑room (.) .hhhh it's got a:: very  
 193 comfortable couch it's a room where i can::: shar:e (0.2) the  
 194 space with everybody. (0.6) um::: he.hh (0.7) probably my most-  
 195 (.) the favourite- (.) my most favourite element about the room  
 196 is the couch it's (0.5) bi::g (0.5) it's got lots of pillows  
 197 (0.2) .hhh and (0.3) you can basically jump on it erm lie on it  
 198 do whatever on it and it's- (0.5) it's still there it won't  
 199 break i've (0.2) done it many times (.) .hhhhh erm (0.5) the  
 200 reason why i like the living room is because. i can go there  
 201 (.) whenever i'm stressed out (0.3) .hh (.) the first thing i  
 202 see when i step into my house is the living room. (0.6) .hh  
 203 which it's big it's grand it's got air condi(he)tio(he)ning.  
 204 which-  
 205 (0.2)  
 206 E: °m hm°  
 207 (0.2)  
 208 C: .hhhh er (.) it's- (0.2) the weather's nice an::d u::m (0.3)  
 209 it's got a television where you can do- (0.2) you can sleep you  
 210 can relax (1.3) you can walk around=it's close to the  
 211 kitchen .hhhh it's close to the bathroom .hhhhh an::d um::  
 212 (.) it's (0.5) i can step outside whenever i need a fresh  
 213 air::? (.) .hh a breath of fresh air .hhhh er ↑um (1.7)  
 214 basically (0.3) do i want to change anything in the living  
 215 room? (0.3) nothing (0.4) er i bought the couch myself so  
 216 (0.5) all the furniture in the (.) living room i- (0.3) i  
 217 bought and i selected it myself i decorated with my mother so  
 218 i'm pretty satisfied with how i:: (0.4) <arra::nged the roo::m>  
 219 (0.7) erm (0.5) as (0.2) ↑maybe a bigger television would be

220 good but that's a different story. (0.7) .hh erm (1) tch .hh er  
 221 how is it decorated. .hhh <<it's got::>> (0.4) >well it's got  
 222 four walls it's got< two ↓pain↑tings which i bought from  
 223 sou'africa? (0.2) .hh from a <<↓pai:n↑te::r>> er::m::: (0.4)  
 224 >on our trip< from our trip back from cape town (0.5) .hhh and  
 225 it w's:: (0.7) it's massive its lik::e (0.3) .hhh a metre and a  
 226 half (0.3) wide (0.3) .hhh and erm it's:: got flowers on  
 227 flowers which i think really lights up the room and my um:: (.)  
 228 my sister? (0.3) she:: (0.4) with the painting we have a buffet  
 229 table (.) .hh in front of the painting (0.2) .hh she decorated  
 230 with (.) um sunflowers (0.5) fake su(he)nflowers in a:: bath  
 231 that she made herself (0.3) which (0.4) probably:: linked up  
 232 with the:: the pictu::re and i ↑↑thought y'know it's very cute  
 233 an it's very:: (0.5) it's very (ho↑mey) like (0.2) you feel  
 224 like you wanna relax you feel like your at ho::me you feel  
 225 like- (0.5) you can enjoy the space with everybody:: (1.5) at  
 226 first i w's gonna say bedroom. but i just thought na: living  
 227 room's much because i like it and everybody.  
 228 (0.7)  
 229 E: okay:: alright (0.2) and er:m (0.3) i take it spend a lot of  
 230 time in this room (0.3) yeah?  
 231 (.)  
 232 C: yeah .hh hhhhe=  
 233 E: =okay? alright thanks i'll just take the card back. (0.3)  
 234 al↑right been talking about <your favourite room.> an i'd just-  
 235 (0.5) <like to::> (0.4) erm discuss with you one or two more::  
 236 (0.3) general questions related to this subject. (0.5) .hhh er  
 237 let's talk abou::t (0.5) erm (0. ) <the per:fect ho:me.> (0. )  
 238 <can you descri::be to me the main features::> (0. ) <you would  
 239 look for in your per:fect ho:m::e.>

## Part 3

240 (0.5)  
 241 C: my perfect ho:m::e. (1) a good view?  
 242 (0.6)  
 243 E: °m:: hm::°?  
 244 (0.5)  
 245 C: u::m::: (2.2) com::fortabl::e? (1.5) something that i (.) walk  
 246 in and i feel like (0.4) not too bi:g not too small (.) my  
 247 per↑fec- home would probably have to depend on a lot of  
 248 things.=my income?=  
 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 roo::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  
 256 how i can make that more: (.) more of my::: my: home  
 257 (0.7)  
 258 E: m::.=  
 259 C: =and the garden hhh  
 260 (0.5)  
 261 E: okay .hh er:: (.) can you compare the advantages of living in

262            older. (0.3) or more modern accommodation.  
263            (1.4)  
264        C:     erm of either older? (.) or more modern? .hhhh (0.3) i think  
265            hhh (0.2) i would go with the more modern with older homes: hh  
266            (0.5) it's:: difficult to look after:: although- (0.2)  
267            has lot's of- (0.4) probably lots of meaning and lots of  
268            memories for (0.2) the person or: ur:: maybe yourself (0.6)  
269            .hhh it- (0.2) takes a lot of time an:: (.) some↑how (0.4)  
270            although- (0.6) older homes doesn't- (.) always suit what you  
271            want  
272            (0.5)  
273        E:     °m::°=  
274        C:     =you have to change it according to:: (0.2) to your lifestyle  
275            but with modern homes somehow .hhh you can:: (1.2) almost like  
276            desi::gn: what you want. (.) what you expect out of the house  
277            (0.2) .hh you <can:: say maybe::> (0.2) you have a large  
278            family:: but then you started of with a small family=you can  
279            extend your family rooms? (0.2) .hh but with (0.2) older homes  
280            it tends to limit you::=as to how much you can put in an::  
281            (0.2) how you can change (0.3) the style of- of living you have  
282            to adapt yourself to the home rather than:: (0.5) the home  
283            adapting:: itself to you::.  
284            (0.5)  
285        E:     okay i think w- w- we'll stop there thank you very much  
286