

Bridging theory and practice in learning-oriented assessment of interactional competence

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Language Assessment
Part of the University of Cambridge

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RESEARCH BACKGROUND



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Interactional Competence (IC)

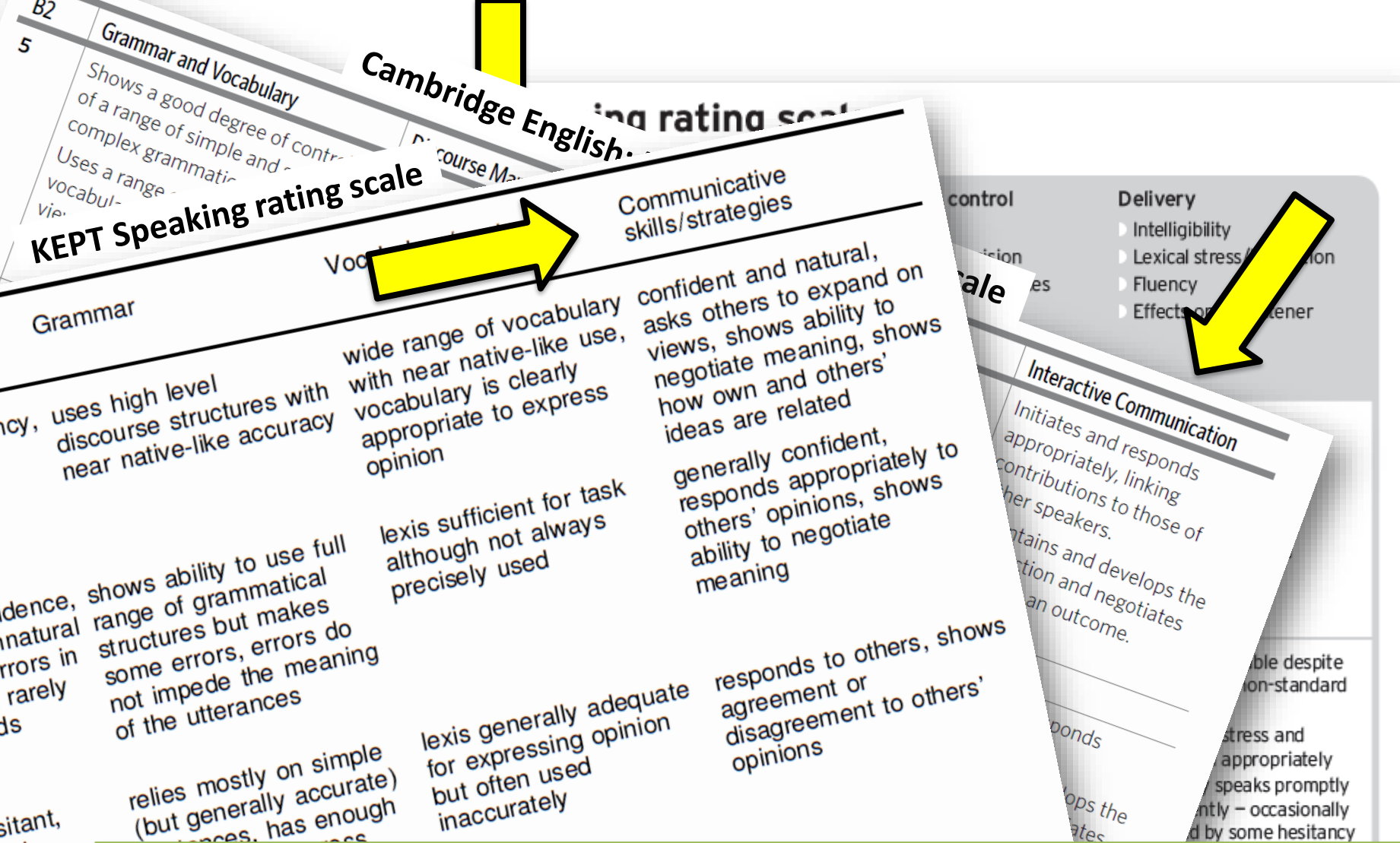
- Communication is **co-constructed by participants** in communication, so responsibility for talk cannot be assigned to a single individual (Kramsch 1986; Swain 2001; McNamara & Roever 2006, Young 2011).

The ability to co-construct interaction in a purposeful and meaningful way, taking into account socio-cultural and pragmatic dimensions of the speech situation and event.

This ability is supported by the linguistic and other resources which speakers and listeners leverage at a more micro-level of the interaction, i.e. aspects of:

topic management, turn management, interactive listening, breakdown repair and non-verbal behaviours.

(Galaczi & Taylor forthcoming)



How separable are test-takers' scores when their performance is co-constructed with a peer test-taker? (Chalhoub-Deville & Deville 2005; May 2011, Swain 2001; Taylor & Wigglesworth 2009)

Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA)

- **‘Test takers are also learners’:** the potential for standardised tests to provide not only a summative judgement of performance, but also feedback to learners (e.g. Galaczi 2014; Jones & Saville 2016)
- **Appropriate and timely feedback:** for learners to ‘feedforward’ (Carless 2007: 59), supporting both current and future student learning (Hattie & Timperly 2007)
- **Interactional competence often neglected in the endeavor to provide LOA for L2 speaking:**
Interactive skills receive relatively little coverage in comparison to other speaking sub-skills in test preparation textbooks.

Bridging theory and practice: Interactional Competence

- **Considerable research attention** to IC in the field of speaking assessment (e.g. Brown & Ducasse 2009; Galaczi 2014; Lam 2016; Leaper 2014; May 2011; Nakatsuhara 2013)
- Research findings **NOT fully realised** in terms of informing the teaching and learning of interactional skills in a **comprehensive and user-friendly way**.
- Not always easy to rate **co-constructed performance** in pairs, but raters/teachers can accurately **describe interactional features** observed in pairs (May 2011)

What about developing a **practical tool** with which teachers can give meaningful feedback on learners' interactive skills?



Aim of the Project

- To develop a LOA tool for interactional competence, i.e. **a practical checklist and accompanying descriptions and recommendations** that teachers can use to provide feedback on learners' interactional skills.

RESEARCH DESIGN



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This project focussed on...

	Grammar and Vocabulary	Discourse Management	Pronunciation	Interactive Communication
B2				
5	Shows a good degree of control of a range of grammatical forms and vocabulary.	Produces extended stretches of language with very little hesitation. Contributions are relevant and there is a clear organisation of ideas.	Is intelligible. Intonation is appropriate. Sentence and word stress is accurately placed. Individual sounds are articulated clearly.	Initiates and responds appropriately, linking contributions to those of other speakers. Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome.
4				
3	Shows control of simple and at grammatical forms. Uses vocabulary with some variety.			
2				
1	Shows some control of simple vocabulary which can be used in everyday situations.			
0				

Cambridge English First
First Certificate

Happiness task (5 minutes)

Here are some of the things in life which can affect our happiness.

1. Talk to each other about how important these things are for a happy life.
2. Decide which two are the most important.

Cambridge English

STUDENT'S BOOK

EMPOWER

WITH ONLINE ACCESS

B2

Three Phases of the Project

Phase 1: Six experienced *Cambridge: First* examiners viewed 12 videos of the *Cambridge: First* collaborative task performance, recorded verbal comments on **the IC aspects that influenced their evaluation** and provided **recommendations for improving IC performance.**

- **Step 1:** View the performance once without stopping, give IC scores and provide a brief summary statement
- **Step 2:** View the same performance again, while pausing the video clip at any point as they wish and commenting on anything that they felt was important to their impression of each candidate's IC.
- **Step 3:** Provide recommendations for each candidate to enhance his/her IC performance.

- **Phase 2:** 72 sets of examiner comments as well as 12 paired test performances were transcribed. Examiner comments were then **thematically analysed with NVivo**. 25% of the data were co-coded.

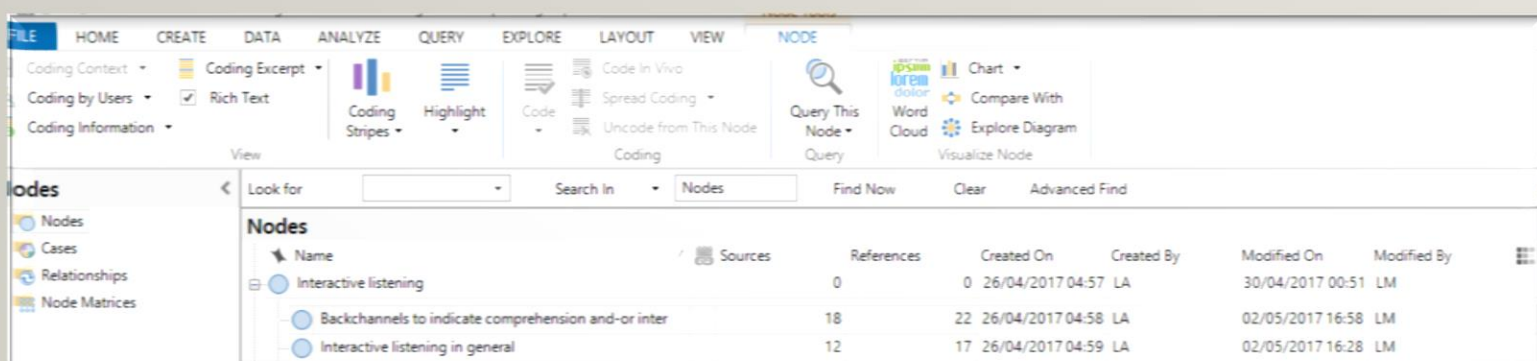
F: Well I think all ideas on the uh on the booklet are quite good actually. I think holiday flats will attract more tourists because there're- it's just more space?

Ok, so they don't start by deciding who is going to begin. Florine just

st
bi
co
to
th

Uh for t
th

M: Mr
be



Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Interactive listening		0	0 26/04/2017 04:57	LA	30/04/2017 00:51	LM
Backchannels to indicate comprehension and-or inter		18	22 26/04/2017 04:58	LA	02/05/2017 16:58	LM
Interactive listening in general		12	17 26/04/2017 04:59	LA	02/05/2017 16:28	LM

F: The themes and sub-themes emerged from the analysis were
Ok interpreted in light of the *Cambridge: First IC* scale and relevant literature (e.g. Galaczi, 2014)

→ **A draft checklist and accompanying descriptions and recommendations for learners.**

M:

F: Mm. Yeah I think you have- can have a lot of fun in parks though.

() very nice picnics with- picnic with your friends or

- **Phase 3:** The draft checklist and accompanying materials were **piloted with four language teachers/examiners** who had taught *Cambridge: First* preparation classes and/or any other interactional speaking skills. → **Revise and refine the checklist and accompanying materials.**



ANALYSIS & RESULTS



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Macro themes for salient IC features

Criterion aspects		No of coded comments
Theme 1	Initiates discussions, introduces new ideas	204
Theme 2	Responds to partner	236
Theme 3	Maintains and develops the interaction	382
Theme 4	Negotiates towards a common decision	61
Theme 5	Extent to which support is needed	42
Non-criterion aspects		
Theme 6	Interactive listening	40
Theme 7	Body language	78
Theme 8	Manner of interaction and how natural the interaction is	94

Theme 3: Maintains and develops the interaction

Actively invite partner in by asking questions

'Do you think it's useful or not?'

'Which one do you think is more important, X or Y?'

Talk to partner
'What did you mean by...?'

Share with partner
'You've said X is more important. Why do you think so?'



Dominate the interaction or often

monologues, not sharing the floor



Develop ideas by **explaining, elaborating, justifying and/or providing examples**

Provide only **minimal** or **brief** responses that do not develop an idea/topic further

Carefully consider the points under discussion and contribute responses **relevant** to the topic/task

Move on to a next idea before the current idea has been adequately discussed

Respond in ways that are **not relevant** to partner's point and/or task



Use a range of **functional language appropriate** to interaction

Overuse formulaic expressions

Theme 6: Interactive listening

Show **listener support** and display **interest** in partner's talk (e.g. through back-channelling, nodding, smiling, or eye contact)

Demonstrate they **have been listening** carefully/attentively through extending or developing partner's idea in their next turn

Give partner time to express and formulate their ideas

Show little or no interest in partner's talk and give little or no listener support

Seem more **focussed on what they want to contribute** rather than listening to their partner's ideas or views

Give partner little or no opportunity to talk



Rater recommendations

#	Focus of recommendation
21	Approaching the task
23	Introducing new topics
30	Asking your partner questions
38	Responding to your partner's ideas
16	Developing your partner's ideas
17	Keeping the interaction going
19	Developing your own ideas, justifying, explaining, elaborating
15	Quality of your contributions
14	Amount that you contribute to the interaction
33	The manner in which you contribute: ease, confidence, assertiveness etc.
29	Interactive listening, active, supportive, giving partner time to contribute
4	Maintaining your turn
21	Using functional language, including linking words
3	Using conversational strategies
21	Negotiating toward an outcome
22	Body Language
17	Creating a natural, genuine, authentic interaction

CONCLUSIONS

Highlights of findings

Implications

Future Research



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Main findings

- Examiners attend to **both criterion and non-criterion features**
- Inform the development of...

A practical
checklist of IC

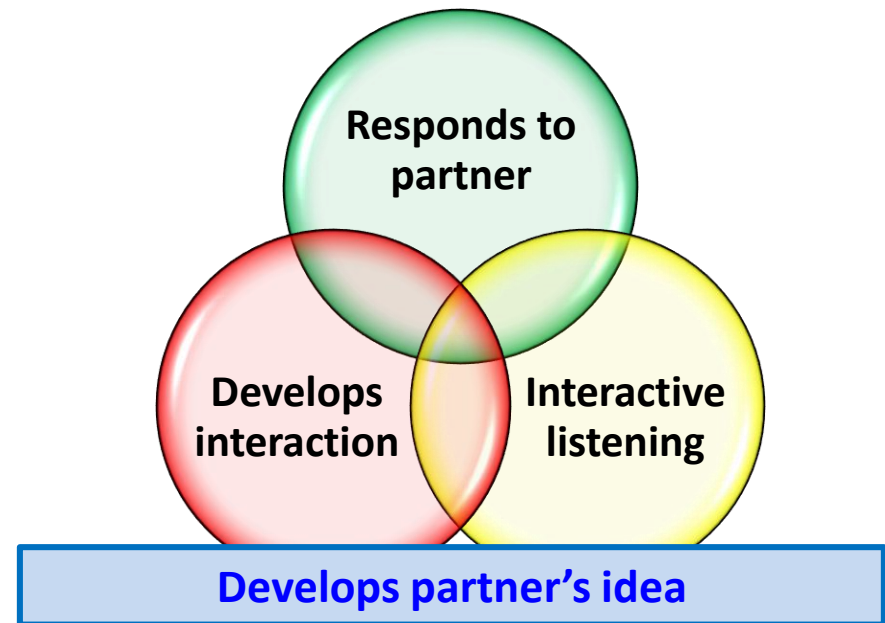
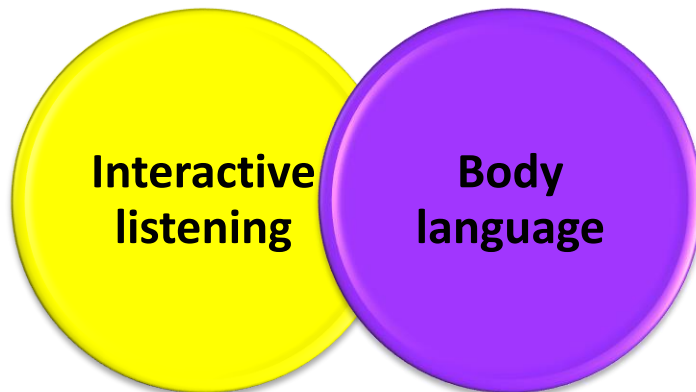
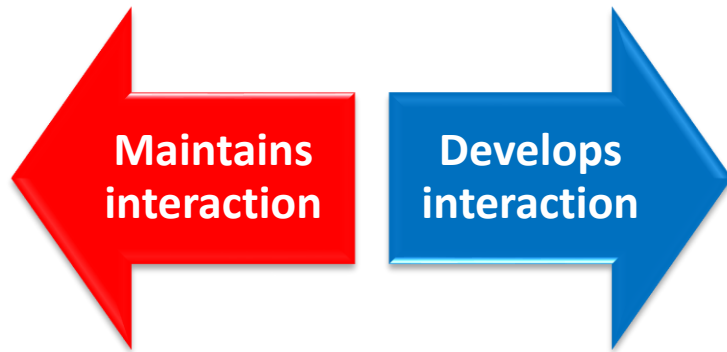
Accompanying
descriptions

Feedback for
learners

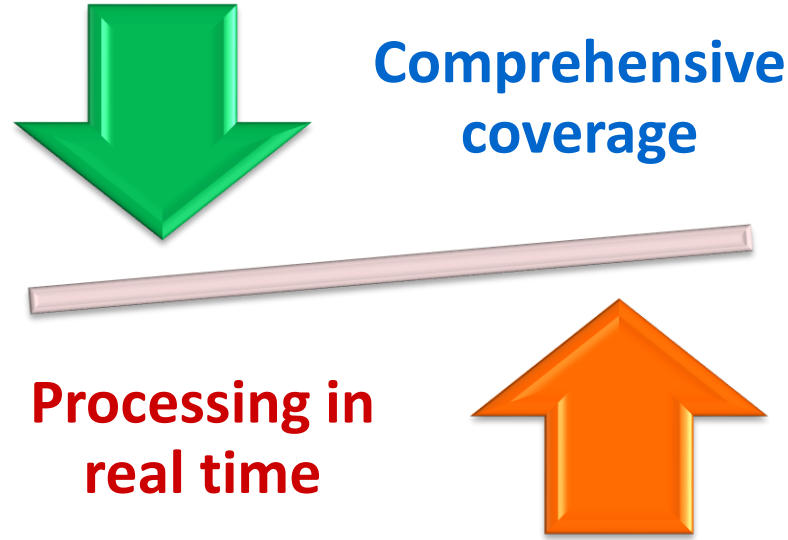
Criterion features		Positive	Negative
Theme 1	Initiates discussions, introduces new ideas	7	7
Theme 2	Responds to partner	3	2
Theme 3	Maintains and develops the interaction	6	8
Theme 4	Negotiates towards a common decision	4	4
Theme 5	Need or provide support	2	1
Non-criterion features			
Theme 6	Interactive listening	3	3
Theme 7	Body language	2	2
Theme 8	Manner of interaction	2	2

Interesting findings

- Different conceptualizations of IC features



Interesting findings



- **Full version**
 - for teaching; 1 category at a time
- **Concise version**
 - for real-time classroom assessment

IC checklist + Description + Feedback

Does the learner.....? (Please tick (✓) as appropriate.)

1.1 Start the discussion?

Positive		Negative		Description	Feedback
1.1a) Negotiate who/how to start in a collaborative manner, involving the partner	L ☐ R ☐	1.1d) Start the discussion with a monologue without involving the partner; or in a way difficult for the partner to contribute	L ☐ R ☐	- A good way for the student to begin the discussion is to involve the partner in deciding who or how to start (e.g. by saying 'Shall I start?' or 'Where should we start?'). It is less desirable to start by delivering a long speech, assigning who to start without negotiation, or starting in a way that makes it difficult for the partner to respond or contribute (e.g. asking a generic question 'what do you think?' or a question that simply repeats the task instructions). - It is also good if the student takes the initiative or shows willingness to start, rather than being hesitant or waiting passively for the partner to start speaking. - However, it is important to show a clear understanding of what the task is about (e.g. 'So, we need to decide which activities would make life in a city more enjoyable.') and where the discussion is going. It is less desirable for the student to start by simply describing a picture.	Well done! → Great to show that you are ready to start the discussion! Well done also on deciding together with your partner who to start or how to start the discussion. You have also shown that you understand what the task is about and where the discussion should be going. Needs more work → Showing that you are ready to start and also happy to work with your partner are both important. Next time, you may want to: - Decide together with your partner who to start (e.g. 'Shall I start?' / 'Would you like to start?') and how to start the discussion (e.g. 'Where should we start?') - Avoid either being too hesitant to start, or starting the conversation on your own delivering a long speech, as your partner may find it difficult to respond to it - Show that you understand what the task is about (e.g. 'So, we need to talk about / decide...'). Try not to start simply by describing a picture.
1.1b) Take the initiative or show willingness to start		1.1e) Wait passively for the partner to start			
1.1c) Start in a way that is clearly relevant to the task		1.1f) Start in a way that seems to ignore the task instructions			

1.2 Contribute new ideas?

Positive		Negative		Description	Feedback
1.2a) Take initiative to contribute new ideas	L ☐ R ☐	1.2e) Not take initiative to contribute new ideas	L ☐ R ☐	- Examiners note as a positive feature when students take the initiative to contribute new ideas. They are less positive about candidates who mostly take the responding role and do not contribute new ideas. - When to contribute new ideas (whether the current idea	Well done! → It is great that you bring new ideas into the discussion. To do this even better, make sure you think about 1) <i>when</i> to bring in a new idea (has the last one been fully discussed?), 2) <i>how</i> to introduce it (e.g. 'well, how about...?'), and 3) <i>how relevant</i> it is to the task.
1.2b) Contribute new ideas after the current idea has been adequately discussed		1.2f) Initiate a new idea before the current one has been adequately discussed			
1.2c) Contributes ideas		1.2g) Contributes ideas which			

IC checklist (Succinct version)

The student can...	The student can...	Learner 1		Learner 2	
		Well done!	Needs more work	Well done!	Needs more work
1. Start the discussion and initiate new topics	a) Take initiative to contribute relevant new ideas				
	b) Contribute new ideas after the current idea has been adequately discussed				
	c) Use appropriate language to initiate new ideas and/or shift from one idea to another				
2. Keep the discussion going (e.g. maintain and develop the discussion, respond to the partner)	d) Extend their own ideas sufficiently				
	e) Extend the partner's ideas by linking their own contribution to the partner's and giving more than just a token response				
	f) Actively invite partner if needed (e.g. asking questions, helping complete a sentence where necessary, prompting partner to say more)				
	g) Show listening - e.g. avoid interrupting, back-channelling and short responses (e.g. 'uh', 'right')				
	h) Use a range of appropriate functional language (e.g. agreeing, disagreeing, explaining, elaborating, justifying, providing examples)				
	i) Keep discussion going over several turns				
3. Negotiate towards a common decision	j) Proactively work towards making a joint decision (e.g. inviting the partner to make a choice, showing willingness to compromise)				
	k) Use a range of appropriate functional language (e.g. summarising, evaluating, comparing, prioritising points raised in the discussion)				
4. Use body language appropriately and interact collaboratively	l) Use appropriate body language (e.g. nodding, smiling) to display interest in partner's contributions and/or signal the change of speakers				
	m) Maintain appropriate eye contact with partner				
	n) Keep a natural and collaborative flow to the interaction (e.g. no long pauses within/between turns, no dominating interruptions)				

Implications

*A practical tool with a clearly defined IC construct
based on empirical evidence*

- Empower **teachers**: a more systematic way to teach IC skills
- Provide **learners** with personalised feedback
- Benefit **test designers**: IC rating scales
- Raise **examiners and teachers'** awareness during training
- Provide **textbook publishers** with a systematic way to incorporate materials for IC skills

Future Research

- A **RESOURCE BANK** of worked examples
 - +ve/-ve IC features in their interactional contexts
- The **USE AND USEFULNESS** of the checklist tool in **LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS**
- An IC checklist for **OTHER LANGUAGES?**

THANK YOU!

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