

Tapping Interactional Competence with Different Task Types

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Overview

Interactional competence (IC)

- Identified by scholars as a critical component of success in both L1 and L2 oral communication.



The ability to draw upon resources to shape co-constructed meaning in a dynamic process

What is IC? According to Kramsch (1986), it entails

- negotiating intended meanings
- adjusting one's speech to the effect one intends to have on the listener
- anticipating the listener's response and possible misunderstandings
- clarifying one's own and the other's intentions
- arriving at the closest possible match between intended, perceived, and anticipated meanings." p. 387



Most descriptions of IC stress these features:

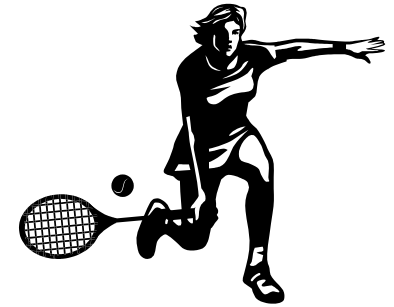
- **Local, situated** nature of language competence
- **Negotiation of meaning** through **face-to-face** interaction
- **Joint co-construction** by the participants

**Language shapes context;
context shapes language**

(Johnson, 2003)

Analogy: IC and tennis

Each individual player brings individual skills and resources to the tennis court: e.g. backhand, serving skills, speed, strength, visual acuity, stride



In actual play, these skills are drawn upon to create “the game.”

- The game is a **co-construction** of the players.
- The game is bound by both the immediate and larger socio-historical context.
- During the game, we can evaluate how well the individuals utilize their **resources in action**
- We can rate the quality of “the game.”

Study Questions

- To what degree does candidate performance on different test tasks actually show that candidates draw upon a range of IC resources in accomplishing the task?

Method: Evaluate recordings and transcripts of candidates doing two different CLB test tasks to determine what interactional resources are needed and used in each.

Tools: Checklist - drew on: Young, 2011; Brooks, 2009; O'Sullivan et al., 2002; Galaczi, 2008

Checklist: 3 levels

1. **Micro: Aspects of the candidate's performance in interaction that evidence use of IC resources at the level of adjacency pairs**

Adjacency pairs: two utterances that go together

Example: offer→acceptance

2. **Macro: Aspects of the candidate's performance in interaction that serve larger goals of the interaction**
3. **Global traits of the interaction itself**

Tests and Test Tasks Examined

TESTS EXAMINED

- CLB Exit Tasks: exemplars of candidate performance
 - Semi-structured interviews
 - Role play dialogues

- Workplace Language Assessment Exit Tasks
 - Exemplars of semi-structured interviews

Results: “micro” categories

Aspects of IC observed in both Role Plays and Semi-structured Interviews:

- demonstrating comprehension
- back-channeling
- providing repair of other
- asking for help
- asking for clarification/confirmation
- establishing common ground
- demonstrating appropriate response in adjacency pairs

Results: “micro” categories

Observed only in Role Plays

- eliciting an opinion
- appealing for agreement

These appeared when role relationship was equal, or asymmetrical with candidate in the power position.

Example: APPEALING FOR AGREEMENT

Candidate RP8: “Don’t you think so, Mrs. Nelands?”

Example: ELICITING AN OPINION

Candidate RP8: “Do you like it so far?”

Results: “micro” categories

Aspects of IC observed only in Interviews

- correction uptake

Example: SSI3

Candidate: “... sometimes we go to video house or friend’s house but uh the weekend uh we spent uh smaller distance to travelling because uh, two days, but vacation we uhh lots, lotta days so we spend uhhh...”

Int: “longer time?”

Can: “longer time”

These results are easily explained when one considers the rights and responsibilities that the task demands or allows for (Heritage & Clayman, 2010)

Results: “macro” categories

“Macro” aspects of IC observed in both role plays & interviews

- Extending/expanding a topic

“Macro” aspects of IC observed only in role plays

- Opening a practice
- Closing a practice
- Initiation of topic change
- Moving interaction toward desired goal

Results: “macro” categories

“Macro” aspects of IC observed only in role plays

- Moving interaction toward desired goal

Example: RP3

Int: “oh well you know I can hear you when I’m trying to sleep in the mornings, so we’re even.”

Can: “oh yes but maybe I can uhm I can try to be a little bit quiet in the morning when I wake up and, and you could also eh uhm try to make less noise or maybe put your instruments in another room further my house.”

Note: This movement was required by role play instructions

Results: global traits of the interaction

Aspects of IC observed almost exclusively in role plays:

- shared rights and responsibilities for shaping interaction
- variety of adjacency pairs
- high cohesion between turns
- multi-turn topics

Quantity of Test-Taker Talk: Interview Task

- The interview task “works” in the sense of eliciting a lot of talk from the candidate = “getting a good sample”.
- Candidates produced between 67% and 76% of the talk in the interview tasks.

Quantity of Test-Taker Talk: Role Play Task

CLB level	Percent of candidate talk	Whose role holds power
4	38	interviewer
6*	66	candidate
6	47	interviewer
7	43	interviewer
7	59	=
7*	66	interviewer
8	65	=
9	75	=
10	76	candidate

Discussion

- Role plays differed from semi-scripted interviews in the opportunities given to the candidates to use their interactional resources
- The opportunity to draw upon a range of IC resources may be related to the power relationships built into the task
- Both semi-scripted interviews and role plays seem to require candidates to employ more interactional resources than would computer-delivered or fully scripted tests
- CLB test tasks can and do tap interactional competence

Implications for Task Design

- A consideration of interactional competence may help us design tasks which give candidates a chance to display a wider range of resources in a wider range of contexts serving a wider range of social actions.
- Tests that incorporate different task types will elicit different aspects and types of interaction
- Fully scripted interviews constrain/limit the range of IC resources candidates use

Implications for Task Design

- If interactional competence is a priority, it must be included in:
 - ▶ Grid construction
 - ▶ Interviewer training

- Checklists have the potential to be used in task design and validation of tasks: Does the intended outcome of a speaking test actually match the language/interaction produced? (as O'Sullivan, Weir, & Saville, 2002, tried to do)

Thank you!

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