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Modernising higher education

Testing speaking skills: why and how?

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Aims of this workshop

- To understand the importance of **speaking tests**
- To be familiar with **different formats** of speaking tests
- To understand the **advantages and disadvantages** of different speaking formats
- To obtain a basic familiarity with **rating scales** and **rating standardisation**

Plan of the workshop

1. **Different test types**
2. **Washback effect**
3. **Speaking tests**

3.1 Interview speaking tests

- Rating interview test performance
- Interviewer variability

3.2 Paired speaking tests

- Performing a paired speaking test
- Advantages & disadvantages

1. Different test types

Test Purposes

- Proficiency tests
- Achievement tests
- Placement tests
- Diagnostic tests

Direct vs Indirect testing

- Direct Testing
- Indirect Testing

NR vs CR testing

- Norm-referenced testing
- Criterion-referenced testing

- **Proficiency tests:** to measure "people's ability in a language, regardless of any training they may have had in that language. The content is … based on a specification of what candidates have to be able to do in the language in order to be considered proficient." → We need to decide what we mean by "proficient"!
- **Achievement tests:** to measure "how successful individual students, groups of students, or the courses themselves have been in achieving objectives." → Directly related to language courses (goal and content)
- **Placement tests:** "to place students at the stage of the teaching programme most appropriate to their abilities"
- **Diagnostic tests:** "to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses"

(Hughes, 2003: 11-17)

Direct vs Indirect testing

- **Direct testing:** "requires the candidate to perform precisely the skill that we wish to measure"
- **Indirect testing:** "attempts to measure the abilities that underlie the skill in which we are interested"

(Hughes, 2003: 17-19)

NR vs CR testing

- **Norm-referenced testing:** "An individual performance is evaluated against the range of performances typical of a population of similar individuals"
- **Criterion-referenced testing:** "Individual performances are evaluated against a verbal description of a satisfactory performance at a given level."

(McNamara, 2000: 62-64, 135)

2. Washback effect

Washback effect: effect of testing on teaching and learning

- **Positive/Negative washback effect**
- **2 major types of threats to construct validity:** "tests are imperfect measures of constructs because **they either leave out something that should be included according to the construct theory** *(construct under representation)* or **else include something that should be left out** *(construct-irrelevant variance)*, or both" (Messick, 1989: 36).
- **Minimising** these 2 threats is significant for generating the ground for fostering positive washback (Messick, 1996).

Our responsibility as testers and teachers

- Testing is very important part of teaching and learning. Testing should give a positive washback effect on teaching and learning.

- If speaking is the ability which we wish to enhance, the assessment should directly test oral skills.

3. Speaking tests

What do we need to decide before giving a speaking test?

- What **aspects of language** we want to assess
- How to **elicit ratable language samples** from test-takers suitable for the aspects of language

We need to decide;

- **Rating criteria** [marking categories, levels, descriptors] [Holistic scales vs. Analytic scales]
- **Elicitation techniques / Test format** (types of questions, task types)

3.1 Interview speaking tests - Let's practise rating interview test performance!

- **Rating criteria:**
  - **Phonological control**
  - **Grammatical accuracy**
  - **Vocabulary range**
  - **Fluency**

  (Taken from ‘Common European Framework of Reference for Languages’, Council of Europe 2001)
- **Test format: interview format** with the following structure

1	**Openings** (1 minute)
2	**Conversation on familiar topics** (3 minutes) The interviewer asks the candidate to talk about him/herself.
3	**Picture Description** (2 minutes) The interviewer asks the candidate to describe a photo.
4	**Conversation on topics from the given picture** (5 minutes) The interviewer asks the candidate questions linked to the picture (from general to extended questions).
5	**Closings** (1 minute)

- Issues of Interviewer variability

Nakatsuhara, F. (2008) ELTJ 62 (3): 266-275

1. Interviewer's interactional variation

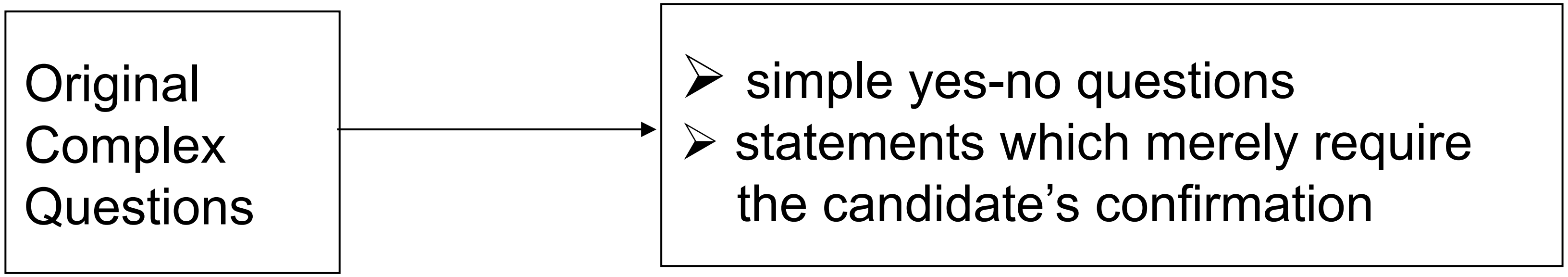
- **Interviewer Accommodation**

(e.g. Slowdown, lexical simplification, rephrasing questions, etc.)

→ **Validate the test**

But, *inconsistent accommodation*
→influence on candidate performance

□ **Deprive interviewees of opportunities to speak**



Original Complex Questions

➢ simple yes-no questions
➢ statements which merely require the candidate's confirmation

(Lazaraton, 1996)

□ **Over-accommodation for candidates at a certain level** (Ross and Berwick,1992)

2. scores affected by the interactional difference

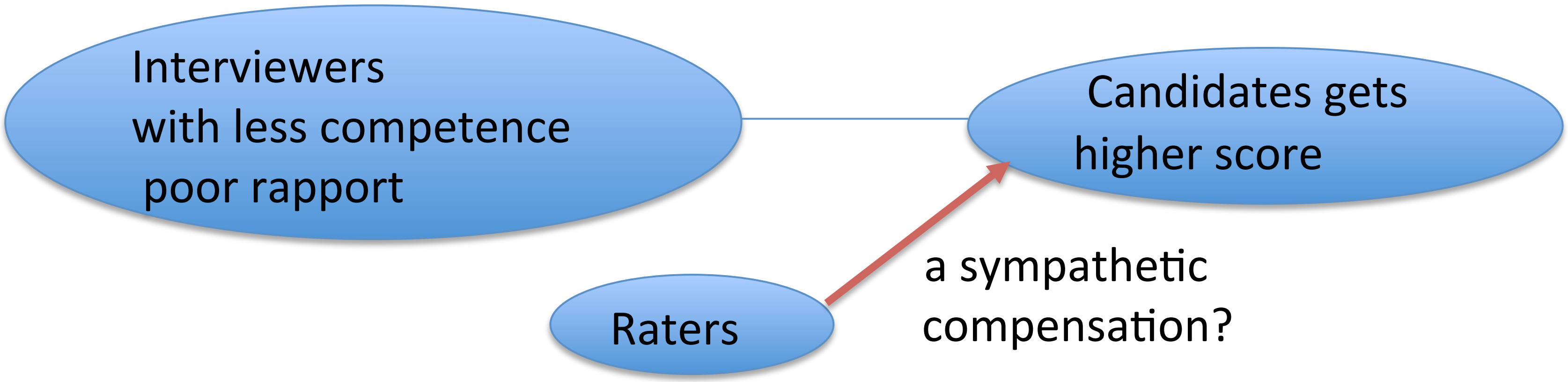
- **"Interviewer difficulty"** (Brown and Hill, 1998; Brown, 2003)

□ ***the easiest interviewer***

0.6 difference (IELTS speaking scale)

□ ***the most difficult interviewer***

- **Ratings and interviewer competence / the amount of rapport** (McNamara and Lumley, 1997)



Interviewers
with less competence
poor rapport

Candidates gets
higher score

Raters

a sympathetic
compensation?

Research Questions

1. Are there **any analytic marking categories** especially affected by the interviewer difference?

2. If so, **what interlocutor behaviour** influenced the analytic components?

Data Collection

Subjects: 1 candidate/ 2 interviewers/ 22 raters (with experience)

Interviewer A / Candidate C

Interviewer B / Candidate C

rated by 22 raters (D-Z)

Analytic rating scale [criterion-referenced]:

Pronunciation
Grammar
Vocabulary resource
Fluency
Interactional Communication

with 4 levels (0-3)

Tasks:

1. **Openings** (1 min)
2. **Conversation on familiar topics** (3 mins)
3. **Picture description** (2 mins)
4. **Conversation on topics from the given picture** (5 mins)
   [General questions → Extended questions]
5. **Closings** (1 min)

Data Analyses

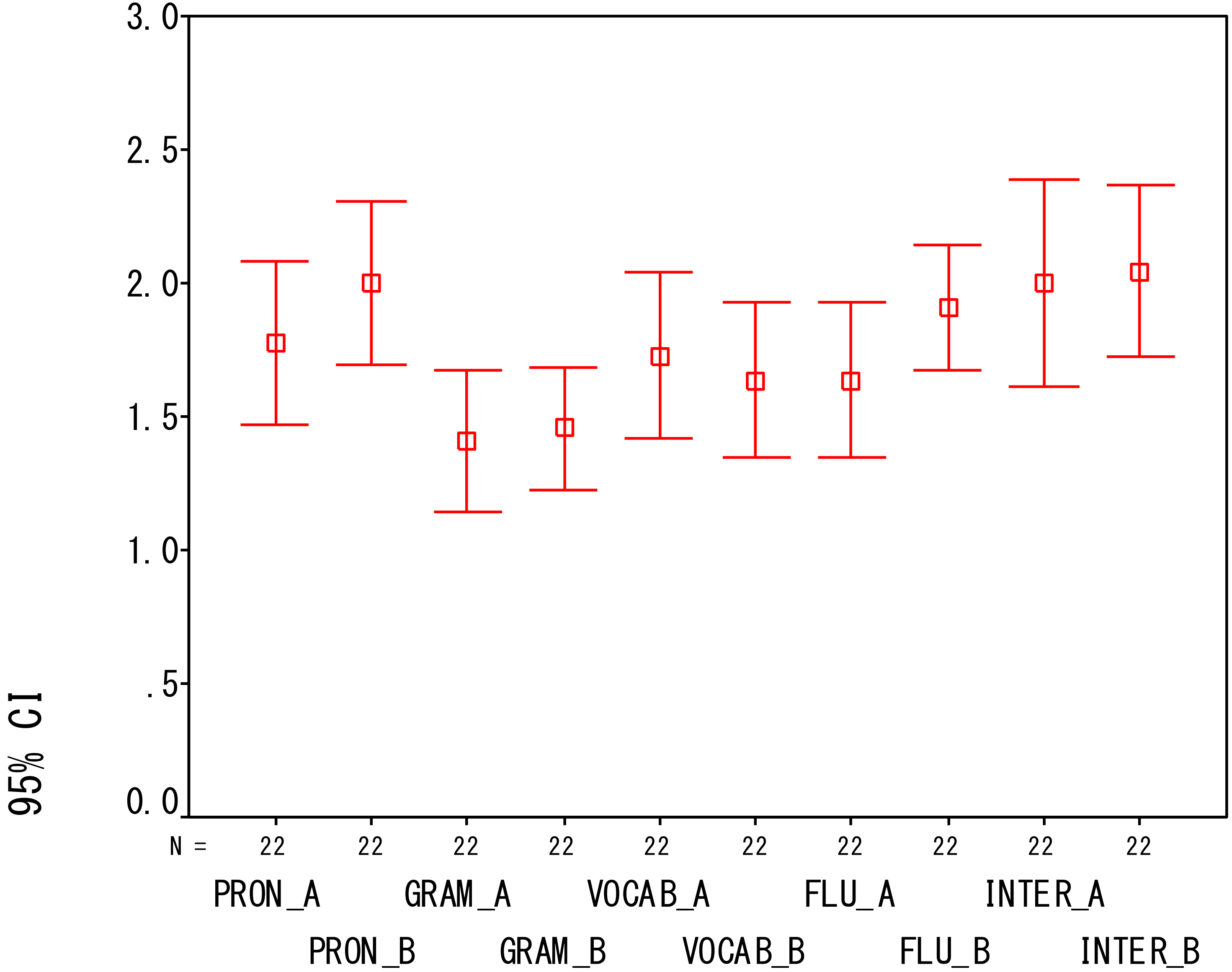
- **Paired Sample t-tests to compare the rating results of two sessions** (RQ1: Are there **any analytic marking categories** especially affected by the interviewer difference?)

- **Conversation analysis (CA)**

→ **The CA findings + commentaries of 22 raters on their rating**

(RQ2: If so, **what interlocutor behaviour** influenced the analytical components?)

Rating results



Inter-rater reliability Tests

Absolute sense: 50%; Relative sense: 77%

Paired samples t-tests

	Mean difference	SD	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	
Pron_A – Pron_B	-.2273	.4289	-2.485	21	**.021**	**Sig**
Gram_A – Gram_B	-.0455	.3751	-.568	21	.576	
Vocab_A – Vocab_B	.0909	.5263	.810	21	.427	
Flu_A – Flu_B	-.2727	.5505	-2.324	21	**.030**	**Sig**
Inter_A – Inter_B	.0455	.7854	-.271	21	.789	
All_A – All_B	-.5000	1.7113	-1.370	21	.185	

Interviewer techniques

<table>
<tr><th>Interviewer A</th><th>Interviewer B</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"><em>1) questioning and topic nomination techniques</em></td></tr>
<tr><td>Rephrasing</td><td>Stating question prompts as statements</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"><em>2) topic expansion and management techniques</em></td></tr>
<tr><td>Topic recycling by various questions</td><td>Frequent topic shift</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"><em>3) receipt tokens and feedback techniques</em></td></tr>
<tr><td>No feedback comment</td><td>Echoing</td></tr>
<tr><td>Non-verbal receipt tokens</td><td>Evaluative comment</td></tr>
</table>

A's topic expansion and management techniques

(1) Demanding more opinions

1 C: Yeh, freedom freedom for child n: if the child is crying, OK if crying OK
2 finish ah will be goo(h)d
3→I: Right. Do you agree with that? Or do you [( )

(2) Requesting reasons for the previous answer

1 C: =but I I think she uh:: doesn't care the ki(h)ds cry(hah)ing
2→I: All right. Hah hah ha What makes you say that?=

(3) Asking for examples

1 I: =So so in <u>your</u> idea or your point of view, what makes a good mother?
2 C: Em:: (.) manage em something they <u>should</u> manage [and [ha huh
3→I: [Right [For example?
Ahah hah ha=

B’s receipt tokens and feedback techniques

(4) Echoing the candidate’s utterance

1 I: Ah OK right so how long have you been studying here?
2 C: Uh::, about **two months**
3→I: two months?=

(5)

1 I: Uh so you watch videos.
2 C: Um: **Just watching TV** hah hah ha
3→I: Just TV

(6) Evaluative comment

1 I: So their [parents should be responsible.
2 C: [Yah yah yah
3 C: Yes.
4→I: Oh OK Yeah very good. yeah, very very good. OK.

Discussion

- **Why were different scores awarded to "Pronunciation" and "Fluency" components?**

1) *the degree of interviewer control*

A's interview:
Highly controlled

➢topics were clearly defined at every stage

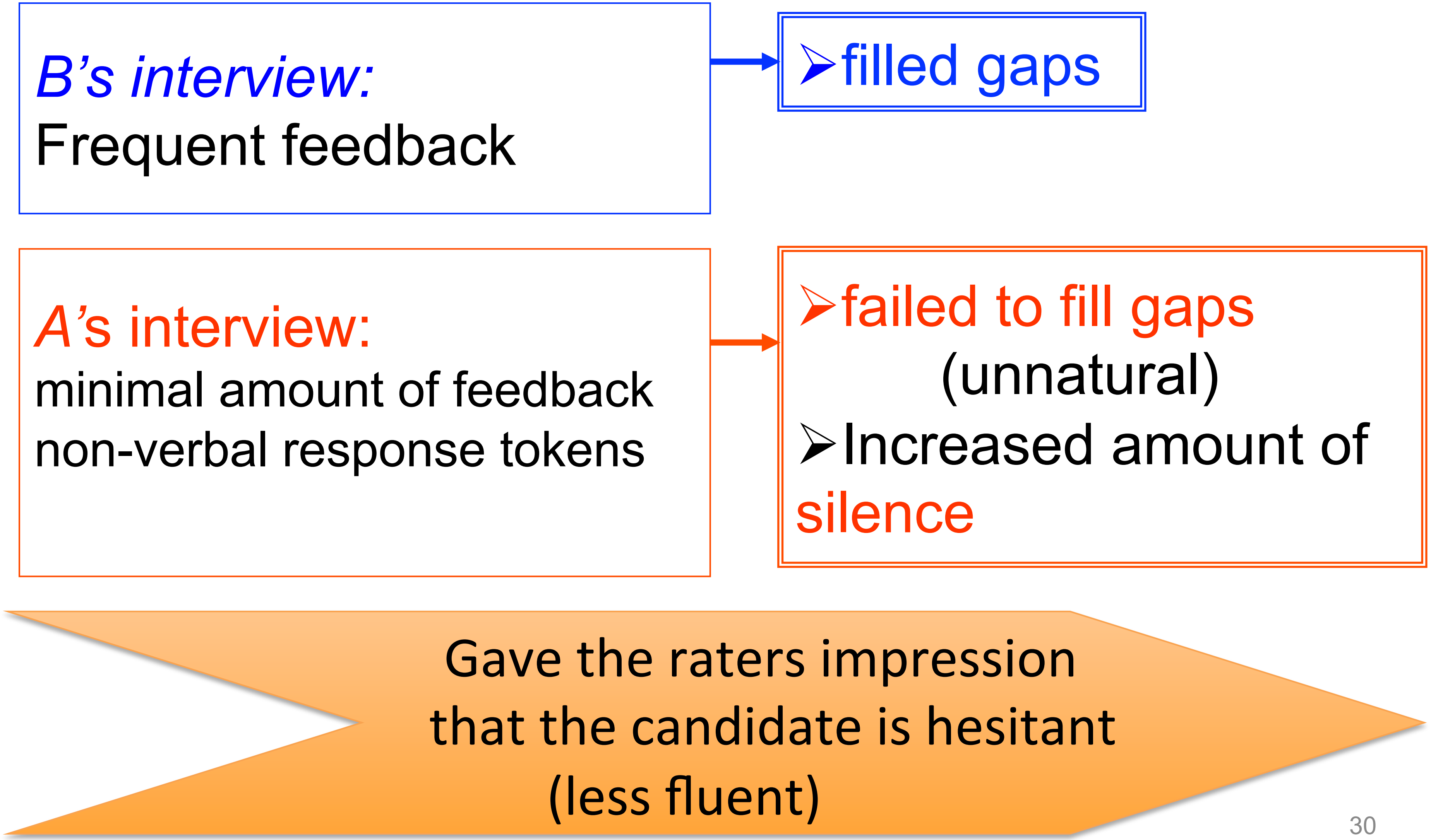
B's interview:
Less controlled
Topic shift

➢ avoided lexis whose pronunciation that she might get wrong

➢spoke more fluently whatever she wanted to talk

Avoidance Strategies
(Faerch and Kasper, 1984)

2) *the types and the amount of interviewer's feedback*



B's interview:
Frequent feedback

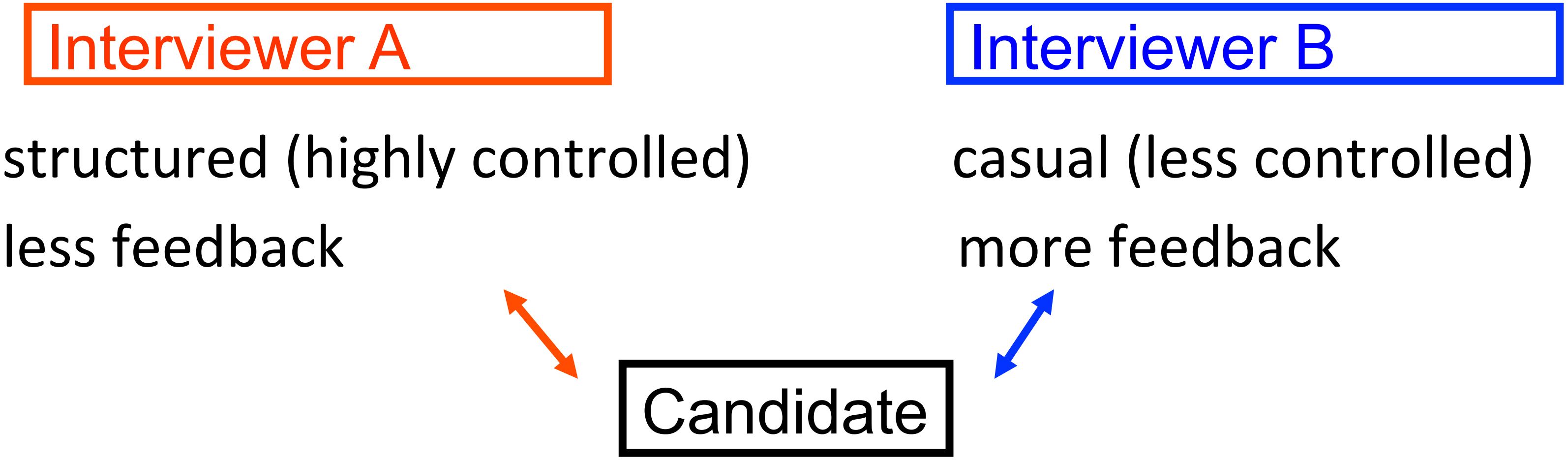
- filled gaps

A's interview:
minimal amount of feedback
non-verbal response tokens

- failed to fill gaps
  (unnatural)
- Increased amount of silence

Gave the raters impression
that the candidate is hesitant
(less fluent)

Conclusion



Interviewer A

structured (highly controlled)

less feedback

Interviewer B

casual (less controlled)

more feedback

Candidate

“Pronunciation” & “Fluency” score differences

- **More precise picture** of the possible relationship between **interviewer variation** and **rating scores** affected

3.2 Paired speaking tests - Let’s perform a paired speaking test!

Cambridge EFL examinations

KET (1993-); PET (1995-); FCE (1996-); CAE (1991-); CPE (2004-)

Ex. The structure of the CAE Speaking Test

1	Three-way conversation between the candidates and the interlocutor	3 minutes
2	Individual long turns with brief responses from second candidate	4 minutes
3	**"Two-way collaborative (problem-solving) task" Two-way interaction between the candidates**	**4 minutes**
4	Three-way conversation between the candidates and the interlocutor	4 minutes

Two-way Collaborative Task (4 minutes) **[Hotel Staff]**

◆ Imagine that both of you are co-managers of a new 4-star international hotel in London. You are looking for 7 different staff positions.

(1)Talk to each other about how demanding/ important these jobs are.

(2)Rank the 7 jobs according to the salary you are prepared to pay them, and give your reasons.

◆ *Can you both try to agree on the rank-order?*

Waiter

Chef

Receptionist

Porter

Barman

Pianist

Cleaner

Advantages of Paired formats

- Why do you think this particular test format is preferred?

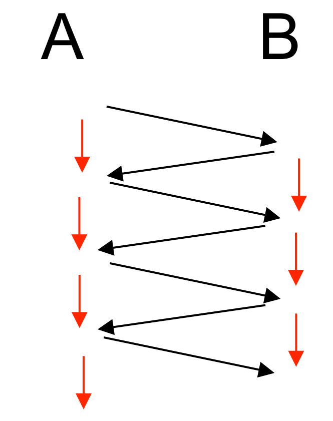
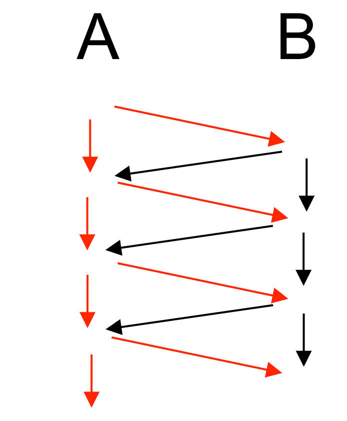
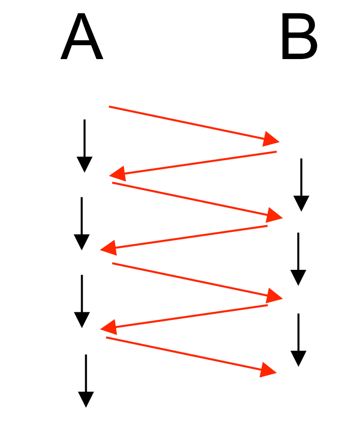
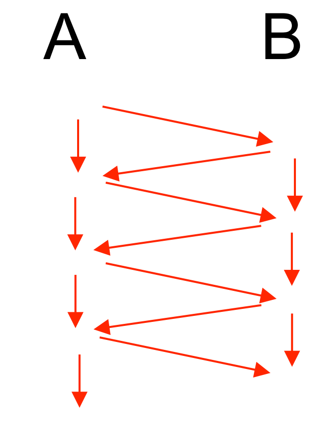
- What language functions / language aspects do you think are tested in paired formats which are **not** tested in interview formats?

Advantages of Paired formats

- Capable of **eliciting more symmetrical contribution** to the interaction from test-takers
- Capable of **eliciting a much richer and more varied language functions**
- **Positive reaction** from test-takers (less anxious), a sign of **positive washback** effect
- **Practical**: time-efficient, cost-effective, less burden and less training for the examiners

Comparisons of Interview Discourse with Conversational Discourse

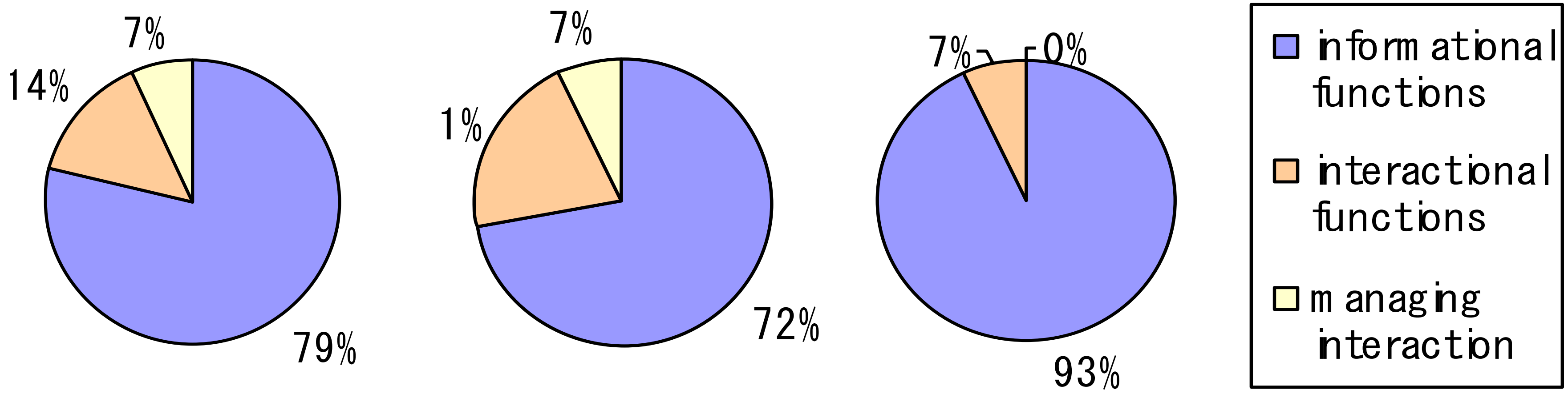
(van Leir,1989;Young and Milanovic,1992; Young,1995; Kormos, 1999)

Time				
	Pseudo-Contingency	**Asymmetrical Contingency**	**Reactive Contingency**	**Mutual Contingency**
Ex. Inter-action	• acting in a play • rituals (e.g. greeting)	• interviewing • (traditional) teaching	• rambling conversation	• negotiation • serious discussion

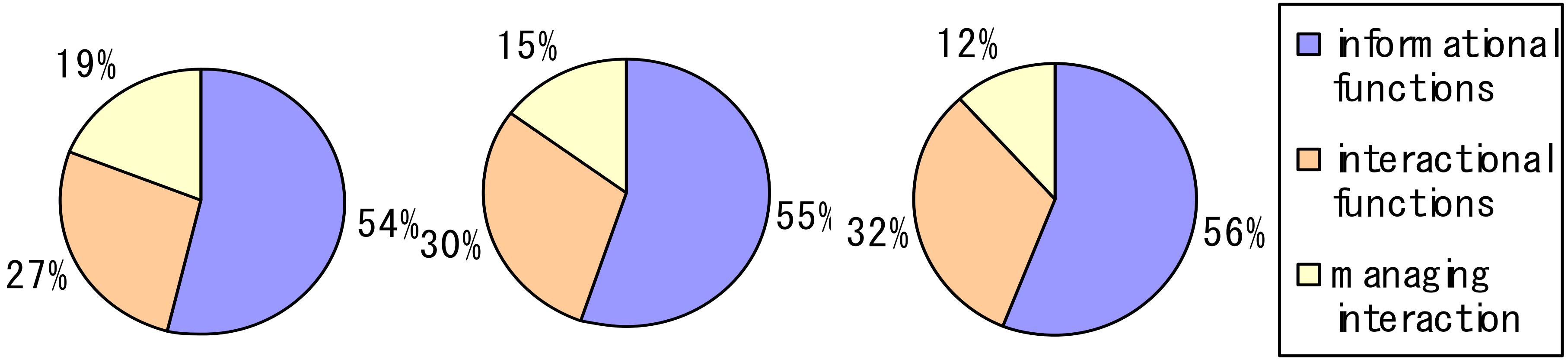
Richer language elicitation

(ffrench, 1999 cited in ffrench, 2003: 413)

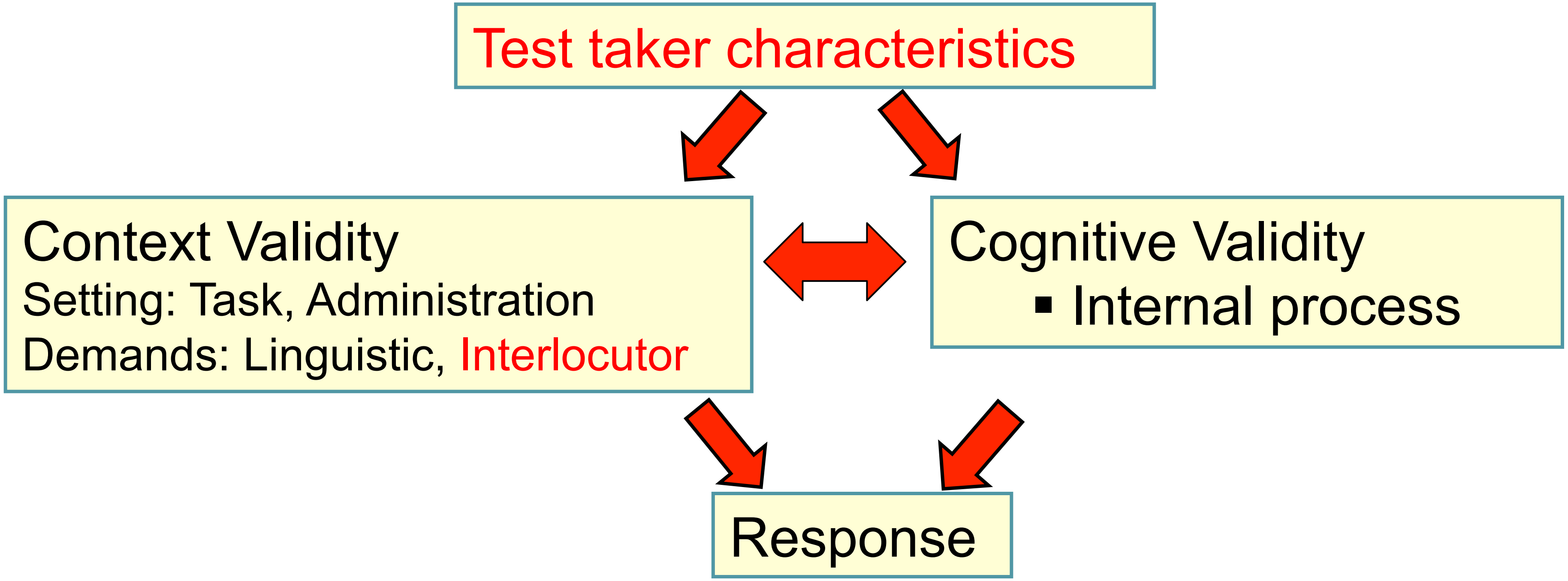
Use of language functions by percentage [individual speaking tests]



Use of language functions by percentage [paired speaking tests]



Issues related to Paired formats: Impact of test-taker characteristics



Test taker characteristics

Context Validity
Setting: Task, Administration
Demands: Linguistic, Interlocutor

Cognitive Validity
- Internal process

Response

Socio-cognitive framework for validating speaking tests
(Weir, 2005; Taylor, ed. 2011)

Test taker characteristics

Gender, Acquaintanceship, Cultural background, L1, Personality, Proficiency level (e.g. Berry, 2007; Nakatsuhara, 2013; Norton, 2005; Ockey, 2006; O'Sullivan, 2008; Van Moere & Bonk, 2004)

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