Cambridge Assessment English

Learning Oriented Feedback and Interactional Competence

Foreword

This issue contains a report from the Cambridge English Funded Research Programme. This programme provides funding and other support for researchers at universities and other institutions to carry out projects related to Cambridge English tests and services. The purpose is to enable independent research on our tests and support the global language testing community. Earlier reports from the Funded Research Programme have appeared in *Research Notes* issues 47, 52, 54, and 57, and information about it can be found at www.cambridgeenglish.org/research-and-validation/research-and-collaboration/#funded-research.

The lead researcher for this project was Fumiyo Nakatsuhara of the University of Bedfordshire. The project was about interactional competence in learners who are preparing to take B2 First (formerly known as *Cambridge English: First*) or are at a similar level. Interactional competence is an aspect of conversational speaking ability that includes turn-taking, managing and developing a conversation, listening and responding appropriately, and helping the other person or persons as needed. These skills are sometimes neglected in the classroom in favour of the more obvious aspects of speaking proficiency such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency.

The purpose of the project was to create a detailed checklist to help teachers give feedback to learners on their interactional competence. The checklist can be seen in Appendix 5, and a concise version of the checklist, which should be more practical for use in the classroom, is provided in Appendix 6. As the researchers mention, the checklist could also be used by learners for self- or peer-assessment.

This project makes a valuable contribution to describing interactional competence and goes some way to address the deficit in high-quality teaching and learning materials for these skills. We hope the checklist will be used widely.

Learning Oriented Feedback in the Development and Assessment of Interactional Competence

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Executive summary

This project developed practical tools to support the classroom assessment of learners' interactional competence (IC) and provide learning-oriented feedback in the context of *Cambridge English: First* (now known as B2 First). To develop a checklist, accompanying descriptions and recommendations for teachers to use in providing feedback on learners' interactional skills, 72 stimulated verbal reports were elicited from six trained examiners who were also experienced teachers. They produced verbal reports on 12 paired interactions with high, mid, and low *interactive communication* scores. The examiners were asked to comment on features of the interaction that influenced their rating of candidates' IC and, based on the features of the performance they noted, provide feedback to candidates. The verbal reports were thematically analysed using Nvivo 11 to inform a draft checklist and materials, which were then trialled by four experienced teachers in order to further refine these resources. The final product comprises (a) a full IC checklist with nine main categories and over 50 sub-categories which further specify positive and negative aspects, accompanying detailed description of each area and feedback to learners, and (b) a concise version of the IC checklist with fewer categories and 'bite-sized' feedback to learners, to support use by teachers and learners in real-time.

As such, this research addressed the area of meaningful feedback to learners on IC, which is an essential component of communicative language and yet cannot be effectively addressed via digital technologies and therefore needs substantial teacher involvement. This study, in line with the Cambridge English Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA) approach (e.g. Hamp-Lyons and Green 2014, Jones and Saville 2014, 2016), took the first step to offering teachers practical tools for feedback on learners' interactional skills. Additionally, these tools have the potential to be integrated into the learning management system of the Empower course, aligning classroom and standardised assessment.

Acknowledgements

1   Introduction

In today's society, where mobility of students and professionals is the norm, interactional competence (IC), in addition to other linguistic competencies, is considered essential for them to be successful in social, educational and professional domains. In a recent survey of over 5,000 employees in 38 countries, 35% of respondents identified speaking as the most important language skill in the workplace (Cambridge English and Quacquarelli Symonds 2016). It is therefore not surprising that many language exams include speaking as a key component, and the assessment of IC often plays an important role in direct speaking tests. For example, *Cambridge English: First* (formerly known as *FCE*)[1] assesses learners' language and interactional skills 'to live and work independently in an English-speaking country or study on courses taught in English' (Cambridge English 2018), and it includes the assessment of *interactive communication skills* in its speaking test. However, while IC has attracted considerable attention in the field of speaking assessment research and practice, its theoretical conceptualisation and practical operationalisation have not been fully developed in terms of informing the teaching and learning of interactional skills in a comprehensive and user-friendly way. The aim of this project was therefore to develop a practical checklist and accompanying descriptions and recommendations that teachers can use to provide feedback on learners' interactional skills.

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1 Since this study was undertaken, the exam has been renamed B2 First.
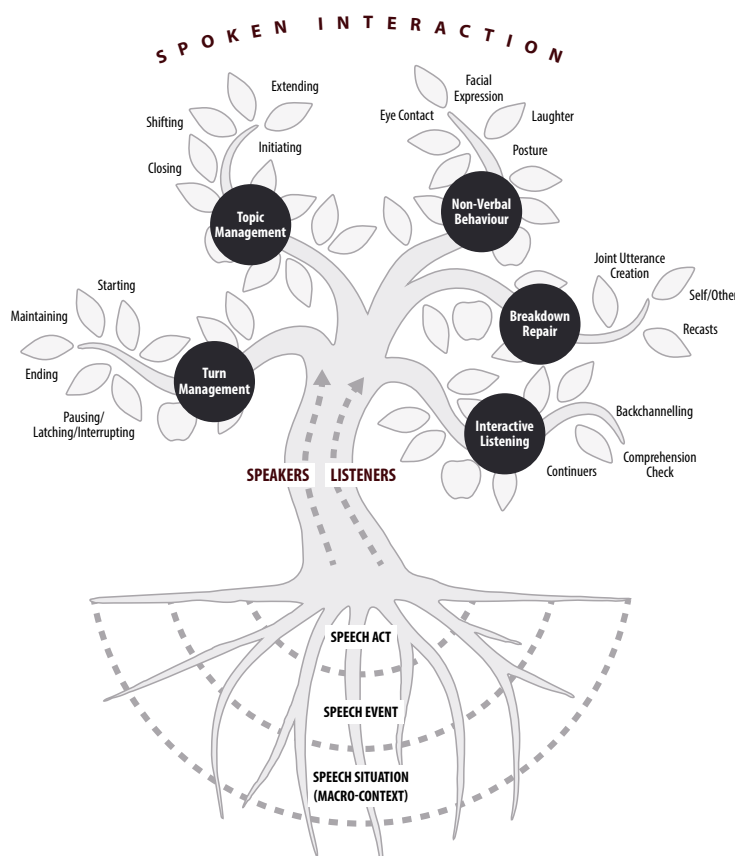
2   Background of the research

2.1.   Interactional competence

The focus on interaction has challenged established notions of 'communicative competence' and 'communicative language ability' (Bachman and Palmer 1996, Canale and Swain 1980), suggesting that conceptualisations have to expand beyond a view of language competence as residing within an individual to a more social view where communicative language ability and the resulting performance reside within a social and jointly constructed context. Kramsch (1986) – the first to introduce the term 'interactional competence' – has convincingly argued that communication is co-constructed by participants in communication, so responsibility for talk cannot be assigned to a single individual. Others have since supported this interactionist approach to IC as a set of resources that reside not within an individual but are accomplished mutually and reciprocally by the participants in a discourse (e.g. McNamara and Roever 2006, Swain 2001). More recently, Young (2011) has argued that the fundamental difference between communicative competence and IC is that 'an individual's knowledge and employment of [an individual's IC] resources is contingent on what other participants do; that is, IC is distributed across participants and varies in different interactional practices' (Young 2011:430).

Following on from these theoretical debates, there is now a solid body of academic research which has provided useful insights about the co-construction of interaction between test takers, and has paved the way for a comprehensive definition of the construct of IC (e.g. Ducasse and Brown 2009, Galaczi 2008, 2014, Gan 2010, Gan, Davison and Hamp-Lyons 2008, Lam 2018a, Lazaraton 2002, May 2011, Nakatsuhara 2013, van Moere 2006).

These investigations have contributed to the definition and conceptualisation of IC in test-taker discourse and have suggested that IC is the ability to co-construct interaction in a purposeful and meaningful way, taking into account sociocultural 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 and Taylor 2018). A visualisation of the construct of IC and its elements is given in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Definition of interactional competence (reprinted from Galaczi and Taylor 2018:227)

In the past few decades, the construct of IC has been operationalised in several face-to-face, interactive speaking tests, such as Cambridge English General English tests, Kanda English Proficiency Test (KEPT), the Test of English for Academic Purposes (TEAP), and Trinity's Integrated Skills of English (ISE) Speaking and Listening test. Three examples are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Example rating scales for IC

Name of the test (target CEFR level)	Trinity ISE II Speaking & Listening scale (Level B2)	Kanda English Proficiency Test (KEPT) (not level-specific; covers approximately Level A1–B2+)	Cambridge English: First (Level B2)
Rating category	**Communicative effectiveness**	**Communicative skills/strategies**	**Interactive communication**
Example descriptors	**4** Fulfils the task very well. Initiates and responds with effective turn-taking. Effectively maintains and develops the interaction. Solves communication problems naturally, if any. **3** Fulfils the task appropriately. Initiates and responds appropriately. Maintains and develops the interaction appropriately (e.g. expanding and developing ideas, and showing. understanding of what the examiner said). Deals with communication problems well. **2** Fulfils the task acceptably with support. Initiates and responds acceptably. Maintains and develops the interaction, but contributions are not always appropriate and/or are somewhat dependent on the examiner. Manages to solve communication problems, but requires more than one attempt and/or does not always do this naturally (e.g. 'What?'). **1** Does not fulfil the task even with support. Does not initiate or respond adequately. Does not maintain and develop the interaction sufficiently. Contributions are inappropriate and/or overly dependent on the examiner. Has some difficulty in resolving communication problems.	**4** Confident and natural, asks others to expand on views, shows how own and others' ideas are related, interacts smoothly. **3** Generally confident, responds appropriately to others opinions, shows ability to negotiate meaning quickly and relatively naturally. **2** Responds to others without long pauses to maintain interaction, shows agreement or disagreement to others' opinions. **1** Does not initiate interaction, produces monologue only, shows some turn-taking, may say, 'I agree with you' but not relate ideas in explanation; too nervous to interact effectively. **0** Shows no awareness of other speakers; may speak, but not in a conversation-like way.	**5** Initiates and responds appropriately, linking contributions to those of other speakers. Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome. **3** Initiates and responds appropriately. Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome with very little support. **1** Initiates and responds appropriately. Keeps the interaction going with very little prompting and support.

Trinity's ISE Speaking & Listening test measures both speaking and interactive listening skills through oral communication between the examiner and the candidate. The rating scale has a 'communicative effectiveness' criterion which focuses mainly on *task fulfilment, appropriacy of contributions/turn-taking*, and *repair strategies*. In addition, the rating scale also has another criterion called 'interactive listening', which measures *comprehension and relevance of response, level of understanding*, and *speed and accuracy of response* (Trinity College London 2015:39). KEPT has a group oral component, and its rating scale includes a 'communicative skills/strategies' category, whose areas of focus are *interaction, confidence*, and *conversational awareness* (Bonk and Ockey 2003). The speaking component of *Cambridge English: First*, which is the focus of the current study, is taken by paired candidates, and the test has an 'interactive communication' rating category, tapping into the candidates' ability in *initiating, maintaining and developing interaction, responding to the partner, supporting the partner when necessary (and the level of support one would require), and turn-taking* (Cambridge English 2016:85).

As such, although the aspects of IC focused upon and the ways in which rating descriptors are worded vary depending on what each test aims to measure, the construct of IC has been operationalised in various manners and incorporated as a part of speaking skills in a number of interactive speaking tests.

2.2. Co-constructed speaking performance: Challenges and opportunities

A recurrent question that researchers have tried to address is how separable test-takers' IC scores are when their performance is co-constructed with a peer test taker (e.g. Chalhoub-Deville and Deville 2005, May 2011, Swain 2001, Taylor and Wigglesworth 2009). This presents examiners with a challenge. As Chalhoub-Deville and Deville (2005:826) put it: 'If we view language as co-constructed, how can we disentangle an individual's contribution to a communicative exchange in order to provide a score or assess a candidate's merit for a potential position?'

May's (2011) research on score separability in paired speaking tests was illuminating: raters (who are also language teachers) reported having difficulty in assigning a fair score to individual candidates who they perceived to have been disadvantaged by their partner candidates. Nevertheless, even when they do not agree on what scores should be given to reflect it, raters mostly agree with each other when they are asked to describe what has happened in an interaction. For instance, as shown in the following opinions of two raters, both were able to accurately describe an asymmetric pattern of interaction, while they had different views about who should be penalised for it (2011:163):

> "I just felt … she's saying a lot of information but not to him or asking him what he thinks … so I mean in a way you can't judge someone on anything other than what we see but it seemed to me that he was poorly affected by her lack of interaction." (Rater 1)

> "I thought if anything that she was the one affected by him … and so … really it was a question of him holding her back … because he gave her nothing to work with … and she couldn't really respond coherently because he wasn't really making many points…" (Rater 2)

Based on May's (2011) findings on teacher-raters' capability of accurately describing complex interactional features of paired performance, Nakatsuhara (2013:250-251) suggests that in order to minimise the potential unfairness caused by the interaction patterns oriented to by paired/group members, raters could give a 'descriptive report on test-takers' performance', in addition to test scores. This report could provide a detailed description of key aspects of each test-taker's IC, and give suggestions on how to improve the performance. Acknowledging that this may not be viable for high-stakes contexts, Nakatsuhara argues its relevance for low-stakes classroom assessment contexts. The provision of raters' 'contextualising' notes elaborating on co-constructed discourse is also advocated by Leaper (2014:355-356), who further suggests a feasible method in a testing context (i.e. a drop-down menu with key interactional aspects).

2.3. Learning Oriented Assessment and feedback on interactional competence

The incorporation of meaningful feedback in the context of high-stakes examinations reflects concerns at the heart of Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA), which 'acknowledges the centrality of learners, learning processes, and learning outcomes … in the educational context' (Purpura and Turner 2014:11). It foregrounds the importance of appropriate and timely feedback 'which learners can ultimately "feedforward"' (Carless 2007:59), thus supporting both current and future student learning (Hattie and Timperly 2007). LOA moves beyond traditional binary positioning of the formative and summative purposes of assessment (Davison and Leung 2009), resulting in the potential for more effective synergies between teaching, learning and assessment (Hamp-Lyons and Green 2014). With the focus of LOA on learning tasks, self- and peer-evaluation, and effective scaffolding and feedback, the challenge is to connect large-scale examinations with meaningful learning opportunities in language classrooms where test preparation is undertaken (Jones and Saville 2014, 2016).

Recent studies have highlighted the potential for standardised speaking tests to provide not only a summative judgement of performance, but also feedback to candidates (Galaczi 2014, Jamieson and Poonpon 2013). As Galaczi reiterates, 'test takers are also learners' (2014:555). In the endeavour to provide LOA for L2 speaking, IC is unfortunately often neglected. A review of several test preparation textbooks including the Empower series indicates that interactive skills receive relatively little coverage in comparison to other speaking sub-skills. The Empower series is innovative in its inclusion of various paired/group oral tasks, but little guidance seems to be given for how teachers can feedback on learners' interactive performance.

In the wider literature on assessing speaking, although IC has attracted considerable attention (e.g. Ducasse and Brown 2009, Galaczi 2008, Gan 2010, Lam 2018a, Leaper 2014, May 2011, Nakatsuhara 2013), it seems that the findings have not been fully realised in terms of informing the teaching and learning of interactional skills in a comprehensive and user-friendly way. The current study, with its focus on the development of a checklist and resources for IC, is thus a response that reflects these key aspects of LOA. In light of recommendations from previous studies and the need for practical LOA tools for interactional skills, this study aims to develop a checklist, accompanying descriptions and feedback for learners – materials that teachers who are preparing their students for *Cambridge English: First* can effectively use to feedback on students' IC performance.

3   Research questions

The research questions (RQs) that guided our study were as follows.

RQ1: Which features of IC are salient to the *Cambridge English: First* examiners who are also experienced teachers, when they award scores for the *Cambridge English: First* paired speaking task?

RQ2: How can these features inform the development of a practical checklist of IC?

RQ3: Once the relevant features are identified, how can they inform the development of meaningful feedback to learners?

As will be outlined in Section 4, the project consisted of three phases, and the RQs were addressed via three different qualitative research approaches: 1) a thematic analysis of examiner comments (to inform RQ1); 2) iterative discussions among the research team with expert reviews; and 3) a pilot study with teachers' focus group discussion (to inform RQ2 and RQ3). The RQs and the three phases of the project were designed in such a way that the subsequent phase would build on findings from a prior phase.

4   Research design: Three phases of the study

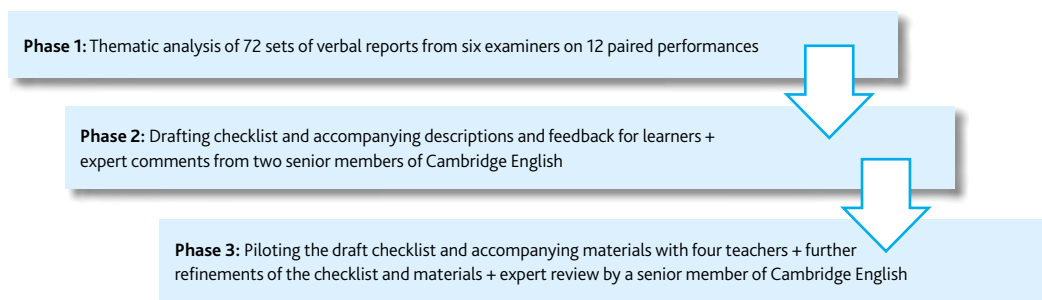The three phases of the project are summarised in this section.

Phase 1: Empirically-based data sources were collected, which formed the basis for a draft checklist and accompanying materials. Six experienced *Cambridge: First* examiners, who are also experienced teachers, participated in this phase. They viewed 12 videos of the *Cambridge English: First* collaborative task performance (Part 3 of the test), recorded verbal comments on the IC aspects that influenced their evaluation, and provided recommendations for improving IC performance. This generated 72 sets of audio-recorded examiner comments, which were then transcribed and thematically analysed using Nvivo 11. The themes and sub-themes which emerged from the analysis were interpreted in light of the IC scale of *Cambridge English: First*, Cambridge English Language Assessment (now known as Cambridge Assessment English) examiner training materials, and relevant literature on IC and checklists for speaking skills (e.g. Galaczi 2014, O'Sullivan, Weir and Saville 2002).

Phase 2: A checklist was drafted, which included accompanying descriptions and feedback for learners, based on the Phase 1 analysis and iterative discussions within the project team. The checklist, accompanying descriptions and feedback were then sent to two senior members of Cambridge English who specialise in speaking assessment. Some of their comments and suggestions were incorporated at this stage in order to maximise the usefulness of the checklist for *Cambridge English: First*.

Phase 3: The draft checklist and accompanying materials were piloted with four language teachers (with a wide range of teaching experience) who teach/have taught *Cambridge English: First* preparation classes and interactional speaking skills in other settings. They each rated six video performances while using the checklist. They then participated in a focus group discussion to share their experiences of using the checklist with accompanying materials, discussing their applicability and usefulness. Based on the insights gained in this phase, the draft checklist and accompanying materials were further revised and refined.

Phase 1 was the most significant stage, at which the main data collection of the study took place. As noted in Section 3, the three phases of the study were planned in such a way that findings from a prior phase fed into the next phase. Figure 2 visualises the process of the research.

Figure 2: Three phases of the research

Phase 1: Thematic analysis of 72 sets of verbal reports from six examiners on 12 paired performances

Phase 2: Drafting checklist and accompanying descriptions and feedback for learners + expert comments from two senior members of Cambridge English

Phase 3: Piloting the draft checklist and accompanying materials with four teachers + further refinements of the checklist and materials + expert review by a senior member of Cambridge English

The following three sections (Sections 5, 6 and 7) will detail the methods for data collection and analysis in the three phases of the study respectively, and report on the findings of each phase.

5 Phase 1: Gathering examiner comments to inform the development of the IC checklist and accompanying materials

5.1. Participants

Six experienced *Cambridge English: First* examiners (Examiner ID: E1–E6) who were also Professional Support Leaders (PSLs) in different regions of the world were recruited to participate in the first phase of the project. The average years of experience as an ESL/EFL teacher were 34.6 years (standard deviation (SD) = 3.5), and the average years of experience as a *Cambridge English: First* examiner were 31.2 years (SD = 6.3). Their experience as a PSL ranged from 5 years to 20 years, with the average of 12.4 years (SD = 6.2). Some of them had contributed to the development of the current IC scales across different proficiency levels, and most of them were involved in the production of standardisation videos and commentary writing to support the marks awarded. The participants had been informed about the aim of the project and their tasks, and signed consent forms prior to their participation.

5.2. Data collection

5.2.1. Materials: Paired discussion video clips

Twelve paired discussion videos from *Cambridge English: First* were selected with assistance of a senior member of Cambridge English. To elicit a wide range of comments from the examiners, care was taken to select video clips of candidates with a range of proficiency levels and of a wide range of discourse patterns. We aimed to include balanced numbers of high-IC scoring candidates (Band 4 or 5 on the *Cambridge English: First* scale), mid-IC scoring candidates (Band 3) and low-IC scoring candidates (Bands 1 or 2).

However, given the limited number of videos of low-IC scoring candidates available in online resources (e.g. Cambridge English TV and YouTube) and the Cambridge English video repository (Galaczi 2016, personal communication), three videos were chosen from *Cambridge English: Preliminary* (now known as B1 Preliminary). The use of *Cambridge English: Preliminary* videos was considered justified without compromising the outcomes of this research, due to the linked scales used. The five sets of scales of the Cambridge English General English exams are vertically aligned (Galaczi, ffrench, Hubbard and Green 2011), and *Cambridge English: First* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary* scales are therefore on one linear scale, measuring the same continuous constructs. The IC descriptors for *Cambridge English: Preliminary* Band 3 are exactly the same as *Cambridge English: First* Band 1, and those for *Cambridge English: Preliminary* Band 5 are exactly the same as *Cambridge English: First* Band 3. The paired discussion formats in both exams are also identical, although the topics are more abstract and the lexis and grammatical structures required are more complex and sophisticated in *Cambridge English: First*.

All videos were reviewed by the project researchers, and the discourse pattern of each discussion was evaluated; additional notes were made regarding the interactional features of each pair. An effort was also made to select candidates with balanced L1 and gender profiles[2] to avoid potential bias due to test-taker characteristics. The selection of the videos was then further reviewed by a senior member of Cambridge English to ensure the representativeness of the dataset.

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2 Since information about candidates' L1s was not available, candidates' nationalities were used to approximate their L1 backgrounds.

The range and distribution of the IC level of the selected candidates were then confirmed by the scores awarded by the six examiners who participated in Phase 1 of the study (see the fourth and fifth columns of Table 2, and Section 5.4.1). The 12 selected videos with candidates' profiles, discourse patterns and the researchers' notes are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Twelve selected paired discussion videos for examiner comments

Pair ID	Candidate ID	Level	Scores by the six examiners of this study		Nationality	Gender (M/F)	Discourse pattern*	Researchers' notes about interaction
			Mean	Median				
P1	C01F	High	4.33	4.25	Holland	F	Collaborative	They address each other's ideas; some quantitative dominance by C01F; C01F prompts and takes more responsibility for initiating topics and C01M's opinion; they engage with each other's ideas
	C01M	Mid	3.17	3.00	Argentina	F		
P2	C02O	Mid	3.58	3.50	Italy	F	Collaborative	C02H develops partner's topic by elaborating on it, accounting for disagreeing etc.; it will be interesting to see the transcription and reflect on the extent to which the initial differing of opinion on museums impacted on C02O's contributions (and confidence)
	C02H	High	4.08	4.00	France	F		
P3	C03J	High	4.00	4.00	Holland	F	Collaborative	Candidates clearly acquainted; overlaps and collaborative turn construction evident; interaction 'runs very smoothly' as in two friends interacting in real life; close rapport, extremely collaborative, extensive 'latticing' of comments; candidates refer to each other by name: 'So what would you prefer, C03J?'
	C03C	High	4.42	4.50	Norway	F		
P4	C04S	Mid	2.92	2.75	Korea	F	Collaborative (+Asymmetric)	C04D successfully elicits C04S's ideas and build on them; C04S is a bit passive; C04D invites C04S's opinions and extends points made by her; both contribute ideas and the interaction becomes more collaborative as they progress through it
	C04D	High	4.17	4.50	Switzerland	M		
P5	C05C	High	3.75	3.75	Italy	F	Collaborative	A lot of collaborative turn construction; moving the task along together; both are able to initiate topics, with some overlaps characteristic of casual conversation and latticing of ideas; C05L tends to agree with 'Yes, yes', but not extend C05C's responses; C05C is able to build on C05L's responses (interesting to note that this task appears to elicit stereotypes of 'disabled people' who 'need help'…)
	C05L	Mid	3.17	3.50	Spain	F		
P6	C06P	Mid	3.10	3.00	Greece	F	Parallel	Looks stilted/contrived; formulaic interaction (floor-passing questions, disagreement); otherwise mostly delivering one's own ideas; extended pauses precede mini-monologues with listing of points initially, but they are able to give differing opinions and C06N refers to C06P by name: 'OK, C06P, what do you think is the most important?'
	C06N	Low	2.30	2.00	Greece	F		
P7	C07A	High	3.83	4.00	Italy	M	Parallel (+ Collaborative)	Some attempts to refer to each other's ideas, but collaboration is rather superficial with formulaic expressions (e.g. 'would you agree with me?', 'I couldn't agree more'); limited eye contact; tense; more communicative towards the end – genuinely disagreeing with each other; very stilted for the most part
	C07G	Mid	3.17	3.00	Turkey	F		
P8	C08G	Mid	3.17	3.25	Korea	M	Collaborative (+Parallel)	C08M constantly builds on C08G's ideas, but C08G doesn't refer to what C08M says; overall, the interaction sounds collaborative thanks to C08M; C08G is able to clearly state his ideas, but has minimal engagement with C08M's; C08M builds on C08G's responses and at one point explicitly prompts C08G to initiate a topic
	C08M	High	4.00	4.00	Switzerland	M		
P9	C09M	Low	2.50	2.00	Italy	F	Parallel	Topic development is 'parallel', but some interactive moves to acknowledge partner's contribution; they definitely become a little more collaborative as the interaction progresses
	C09J	Low	2.80	2.00	France	M		
P10	C10O	Low	1.58	1.75	Turkey	M	Parallel	C10O ignores C10J's contributions; some attempts by C10J to interact; very stilted
	C10J	Low	2.92	3.00	China	F		
P11	C11W	Low	1.42	1.25	China	M	Parallel (+Asymmetric)	Monologue by C11J, followed by C11W's short comment and then again C11J's monologue; some interaction towards the end; they look at the examiner more than each other; C11J begins with a long turn, to which C11W is able to respond; however, C11W is not able to engage with C11J's other ideas; the asymmetry occurs because C11W seems unable to initiate or consistently respond
	C11J	Low	2.33	2.50	China	M		
P12	C12S	Mid	2.92	3.00	Japan	F	Parallel	Good example of parallel interaction; only learned expressions to be interactive (e.g. 'I think so, too', 'what do you think?') are used; very little extending on and engaging with each other's ideas/responses
	C12K	Low	2.20	2.00	Japan	F		

Note: P9, P10 and P11 were selected from *Cambridge English: Preliminary* (now known as B1 Preliminary).

*Interactional discourse patterns (Galaczi 2008):
• Collaborative: Candidates engage with each other's talk and develop both their own and the partner's topics
• Parallel: Candidates develop their own topics but show little engagement with the partner's ideas
• Asymmetric: One candidate is dominant and the other is passive, with unequal amounts of talk and contributions to developing topics

5.2.2. Collecting examiners' verbal comments

Using these 12 video clips, six examiners' verbal comments on each paired discussion performance were individually recorded on digital voice recorders as part of stimulated verbal protocols. Verbal report methodology has been employed in a number of recent speaking test studies and has been demonstrated to be an effective method for gaining useful insights into examiners' scoring processes (e.g. Brown 2006, Brown, Iwashita and McNamara 2005, May 2011). The examiners first received a tutorial that introduced the procedure for verbal report protocols. Following the procedure used in May (2009, 2011), the data collection of verbal reports involved two viewings of videos, using stimulated recall methodology (Gass and Mackey 2000).

Step 1: Examiners viewed the performance on the paired discussion task once without stopping, as if it were a live performance. When the paired candidate discussion finished, they stopped the video. They then recorded the interactive communication score for each candidate, together with a brief summary statement of why they awarded this score.

Step 2: They viewed the same paired performance again, this time pausing the video clip at any point as they wished and commenting on anything that they felt was important to their impression of each candidate's interactive communication. They were asked to comment in as much detail as they could and to stop the video recording as many times as they wished.

Step 3: Finally, they were asked to provide recommendations for each candidate to enhance his/her interactive communication performance, drawing upon their teaching and examining expertise.

The order of the 12 videos that the six examiners viewed was counter-balanced to minimise a possible order effect. This way, 72 sets of audio-recorded examiner comments (12 videos x six examiners) were gathered. On completion of the audio-recording of 12 comments, they were also asked to complete an online questionnaire regarding their background information and feedback on this project (Appendix 1).

5.3. Data analysis

5.3.1. IC scores awarded by six examiners

As noted above, the six examiners in Phase 1 were asked to rate each of the paired candidates in the 12 videos after the first viewing. The scores were analysed to confirm the range and distribution of proficiency levels selected for this study.

5.3.2. Transcription and data preparation for analysis

First of all, the 12 paired discussion performances were transcribed using a simplified version of conversation analysis (CA) notation (Atkinson and Heritage 1984, Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998); the transcription notation and an example transcript are provided in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3. The 72 audio-recordings of examiner comments were then fully transcribed in an orthographic manner. These 72 sets of comments were divided into three sub-sections: the summary statement (following the first viewing), stimulated verbal recall (during the second viewing), and recommendations for candidates (made after the second viewing). In order to accurately match each examiner comment to the section of discourse in the paired discussion to which the comment referred, examiners' specific comments in their second viewing were inserted into the appropriate location of CA transcripts.

The transcripts of the examiner comments were then extracted carefully, and each comment was annotated with an identifier (e.g. E1-1-(1-5)-F indicates Examiner E1's comment on Candidate C01F's performance in lines 1–5 of Pair 1; see an example in Appendix 4). The orthographic transcription of the examiner summary statements, stimulated verbal recalls and recommendations was essential to facilitate segmentation and coding. The data was segmented according to the imperative that 'each segment should be representative of a single, specific process' (Green 1998:75). This meant that the summary statement, each turn in the review and the recommendations could generate several segments. An example from the data is:

E1-1-(22-28)-C01F
C01F introduces a new topic on shops and she develops it adequately

This rater comment was segmented as:
C01F introduces a new topic on shops/
And she develops it adequately/

5.3.3. Thematic analysis

The annotated examiner comments were thematically analysed using NVivo 11. This software, which was designed specifically for working with qualitative data, enables researchers to efficiently manage and query data (Bazeley and Jackson 2013). Themes related to IC as manifested through the rating scales were used to form a provisional list of codes, following Yin's (2011) recommendations on forming initial coding categories. The coding was then carried out both deductively, using these provisional codes, and inductively, with additional codes developed in response to emergent aspects in the data.

From the summary statements and stimulated verbal recalls, eight macro themes and 27 micro themes emerged as IC features which were salient to the trained examiners. Comments within the 27 micro themes were further classified into positive and negative categories. The five criterion (explicitly drawn from criteria on the interactive communication rating scale for *Cambridge English: First*) macro themes were: initiates discussions, introduces new ideas; responds to partner; maintains and develops the interaction; negotiates towards an outcome; and the extent to which support is needed. The three non-criterion (outside the criteria from the interactive communication rating scale for *Cambridge English: First*) macro themes were: interactive listening; body language; and rater reflections which focused on the manner or perceived authenticity of the interaction.

The need for a principled approach to coding is highlighted by Mackey and Gass (2016), who recommend that more than one researcher should code the data wherever possible. In our study, 25% of the data was co-coded. In order to ensure that the co-coded data represent the range of the full data set, three rater reports from each of the six raters (incorporating a range of performances) were co-coded, constituting 18 of the total 72 rater reports. Inter-coder reliability was calculated through simple percentage agreement of codes (Mackey and Gass 2016).

5.3.4. Inter-coder reliability

As noted, 25% of the data was co-coded. Co-coding of the selection of summary statements, stimulated verbal recalls, and examiner recommendations generated the inter-coder agreement rates reported in Table 3. The inter-coder agreement rates were high, with 95.6% for macro themes, 89.0% for micro themes and 100% for examiner recommendations.

Table 3: Inter-coder agreement rates

	Summary statements and verbal reports		Examiner recommendations
	Macro themes	Micro themes	
Segments coded	383	309	108
Agreement (%)	366 (95.6%)	275 (89.0%)	108 (100.0%)
Disagreements (%)	17 (4.4%)	34 (11.0%)	0 (0.0%)

All discrepancies were carefully discussed by the research team, and a consensus was reached on all coding decisions. The coding scheme was revised to reflect these discussions and the remaining data were coded accordingly.

5.4. Results

This section reports on the analysis and findings from the thematic analysis of examiner comments in Phase 1 and insights gained from the Phase 3 focus group discussion with teachers.

5.4.1. IC scores

Figure 3 summarises the range and distribution of the IC scores given by the six examiners, confirming that the examiners of the study mostly agreed with the researchers' selections on high-IC scoring candidates (Band 4 or 5 on the *Cambridge English: First* scale), mid-IC scoring candidates (Band 3) and low-IC scoring candidates (Bands 1 or 2) (also see Table 2 in Section 5.2.1).

Figure 3: Distribution of IC scores awarded by six examiners

Mean = 3.16
Std. Dev. = .829
N = 24

5.4.2. Examiner comments

The macro themes salient for IC features from the summary statements and stimulated verbal recalls (and the number of coded comments) are provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Macro themes and number of coded comments for salient IC features in the summary statements and verbal reports

	Criterion aspects	*# comments*
Theme 1: IN	Initiates discussions, introduces new ideas	204
Theme 2: RP	Responds to partner	236
Theme 3: MD	Maintains and develops the interaction	382
Theme 4: NO	Negotiates towards an outcome	61
Theme 5: SN	Extent to which support is needed	42
	Non-criterion aspects	
Theme 6: IL	Interactive listening	40
Theme 7: BL	Body language	78
Theme 8: RR	Rater reflection, including the manner of interacting and how 'natural' the interaction is perceived to be	94

The findings from each macro theme are elaborated upon: in order to locate the comments, the examiner and paired speaking test have been identified at the end of each comment. Thus, E4, P1 indicates that this comment is from Examiner 4, commenting on Performance 1.

Macro theme 1: Initiates discussions, introduces new ideas

This macro theme encompassed the micro themes of starting the discussion and introducing/ contributing new ideas and topics, and shifting topics. When candidates began the discussion, examiners noted the extent to which this was negotiated and thus seen as collaborative, and the ways in which candidates took the initiative to begin in a relevant way and thus potentially demonstrated an understanding of the task and willingness to engage in it. Examiners commented negatively on candidates who began the task with a monologue, simply described a picture or asked an overly general question. A lack of language needed to realise these functions effectively was also noted.

Positive comments included:

> *This is a good start by C10J. She takes the initiative by politely saying "let's start."* E6, P10

> *The start of the interaction is negotiated by C05C who asks C05L whether she should start.* E5, P5

> *C01F makes the first move. She shows that she has understood the rubric and says that all of them will be attractive and then focuses on one.* E1, P1

> *OK, very natural way of starting "where should we start?', 'I think we should start with…"* E2, P3

Negative comments included:

> *C02O starts the interaction, but she doesn't seem to have paid attention to the speaker's, to the interlocutor's instructions and she starts by describing the picture as if this were her long turn.* E1, P2

> *OK, so C06P starts by asking her partner how she'd think these things help make life in city enjoyable, which is a quite sort of overarching, very general question which her partner is basically unable to answer.* E4, P6

Under the micro theme introducing/contributing new ideas and topics, examiners noted when candidates take the initiative to contribute relevant new ideas at appropriate points in the discussion as a positive feature. Examiners are less positive about candidates who mostly take a responding role and do not contribute ideas, or who begin a new idea before the one currently under discussion has been adequately discussed. Examiners noted that some candidates were more effective at responding than at initiating topics.

Positive comments included:

> *All of the initiations come from C04D who points to each of the pictures and starts each of the discussions going.* E3, P4

> *Natural way to change the subject "I like this picture" and pointing.* E2, P3

> *C08G makes a smooth and effective transition from the point that C08M was talking about to a third point suggested by the pictures.* E6, P8

Negative comments included:

> *C04S is better responding than initiating.* E4, P4

> *C05L is quite passive. She doesn't really initiate very much.* E6, P5

> *But I still feel that C04S could actually [have done more], she's actually left the organization of the task. So much, most of the initiation she's left to C04D.* E3, P4

> *And then C08G moves on to another topic with the linker "and also", which is not really very clear that he's moved to talk about something else.* E4, P8

> *And then moves on to talking about the barbeque. So C10O is making his own selections and he's really working independently of C10J.* E3, P10

Table 5 summarises positive and negative aspects of these micro themes.

Table 5: Initiating discussions and introducing new ideas: positive and negative features noted

Features	Positive	Negative
Starts the discussion	Negotiates the start in a collaborative, polite manner	Unilaterally starts, noticeably abrupt
	Starts by asking partner's opinion	Starts with a noticeably long turn
	Initiates the discussion	Takes a passive role; waits for partner to initiate the discussion
	Starts the discussion in a way that shows a clear understanding of the task/rubric	Starts the discussion in a way that seems to ignore the task instructions
Contributes new ideas/ topics/shifts topics	Noted to initiate often and effectively	Lack of initiation is noted
	Initiates new topics after the current topic has been thoroughly discussed	Initiates topics before the current topic has been adequately discussed
	Initiates topics that are relevant to the task	Initiates topics that do not seem relevant to the task
	Uses appropriate language to signal new topic	Changes topics abruptly

Macro theme 2: Responds to partner

This macro theme encompassed the micro themes responding appropriately to partner and linking own contribution to those of the partner. Examiners valued candidates' ability to disagree politely and also to be able to acknowledge their partner's point and explore both sides of an argument. Examiners also noted the use of token or formulaic responses such as 'I agree' and 'That's a good idea', which were regarded negatively if candidates made no attempt to extend the response beyond those formulaic expressions.

Positive comments included:

> Once again C04S says "yeah, I think so" in agreement and then she explains a little bit why. She doesn't just stop at "I think so". E2, P4

> The way C05C said "exactly" after actually allowing C05L to finish her utterance there was nice. It was good interactive communication. E6, P5

> C08M disagrees politely. Good interactive communication. E1, P8

Negative comments included:

> She [C05C] does respond to what C05L says, but she tends to be quite dominant and has a tendency to finish C05L's utterances for her. So that's not terribly appropriate actually. E6, P5

> There C07A's throwing in a phrase that he's learnt ("I totally agree with you"), but a little bit inappropriate there. It's very artificial. E2, P7

> OK, C10O says "it's a good idea", but in fact, makes no attempt to suggest why it's a good idea. E2, P10

The extent to which candidates were able to link their own contribution to those of their partner and develop one another's ideas across turns was important to examiners.

Positive comments included:

> *And there is some development of topics across turns and across speakers, "football", for example.* E1, P2

> *They both link their contributions to each other's contributions in a very natural way.* E4, P3

> *Another example of topic development across speakers and across turns.* E1, P7

> *C08M acknowledges his partner's contributions and expands on it.* E1, P8

Negative comments included:

> *They keep the interaction going, but they are ... I mean this very much sounds like two parallel monologues. Each one is introducing his or her topic, different topics, but not really listening to their partner's.* E1, P9

> *And C12K replies. C12K doesn't say anything about the sport centre or anything, there's no link at all between what she says and what C12S said.* E4, P12

> *Yes, so C07G gives her opinion, but not really picking up on C07A's ideas. So communication is not very interactive.* E4, P7

Table 6 summarises positive and negative aspects of these micro themes.

Table 6: Responding to partner: positive and negative features noted

Features	Positive	Negative
Responds to partner – general	Noted to respond throughout	Noted to initiate more than respond
Responds appropriately to partner, including politeness, ability to agree and/or disagree	Able to agree in a way which is not token/artificial and extend the response	Responds by completing partner's turns
	Able to disagree/challenge partner politely and justify/support this	Brief/minimal response to partner/acknowledgement of what partner has said
	Able to respond in a manner which indicates comprehension	
Links contributions to those of partner, expands, extends partners' ideas	Links contribution to partner's in a way that develops the topic across turns (co-constructing with partner)	Gives own opinion rather than linking/meaningfully responding to/picking up on what partner has said

Macro theme 3: Maintains and develops the interaction

Although maintaining and developing the interaction are placed together under one criterion, examiners at times clearly differentiated them and would comment that a candidate could do one, but not the other. As reflected in the examiners' comments, *maintaining the interaction* concerns whether candidates involve their partners and share (or dominate) the discussion, whereas *developing the interaction* concerns ways of sustaining/extending talk on each topic and keeping it relevant. One aspect of maintaining the interaction concerns the extent to which candidates invite their partners into the conversation, which is often done through questions. Examiners evaluate it positively when

candidates ask their partner his/her opinion or ask for explanation or elaboration. This gives the partner an opportunity to develop the topic further and shows the candidates' interest in their partner's ideas.

In contrast, it does little to maintain the interaction if a candidate asks the partner very few, if any, questions, and is ready to offer their own ideas or opinions but not involve the partner in discussing these. If both candidates do this, the resulting discussion will orient to a parallel interactional pattern, with each candidate introducing their own ideas/topics without really listening to or substantively engaging with each other.

Examiners also evaluate it negatively if a candidate dominates the discussion or often interrupts their partner, making it difficult for the partner to participate fully in the exchange and share his/her views, or, in the other extreme, if a candidate is overly passive and not speaking even when invited to or after a long silence.

When considering the extent to which candidates were able to develop the interaction, examiners noted whether an idea was developed across turns and whether it has been adequately discussed before students move onto the next point. Ways of developing the interaction include adding information, offering examples, or elaborating on the idea with additional points. In contrast, the interaction does not get developed if the student states a choice or opinion without giving reasons, or only gives minimal or brief responses (e.g. mm hmm, yeah, I agree) when responding to the partner.

Other key aspects that influenced examiner decisions were the quality and relevance of the contributions, including whether candidates consider each idea/option carefully and from different perspectives and the relevance of their contributions to both the current topic and the task. Examiners commend candidates who show a good understanding of what the task requires and could steer the discussion in the right direction. Examiners commented negatively when candidates mainly described details in a picture, rather than relating these to the task.

An interesting aspect that emerged is that some examiners positively viewed candidates trying to widen the scope of the discussion through personalising the task and relating it to their own experience (e.g. asking partner 'Have you done this before?' or 'Do you do this in your country?'). However, if candidates spent too much time on expanding the scope of the task, this could be perceived as being of questionable relevance and impacting on engagement with the focus of the task.

Examiner comments for the macro theme maintaining and developing the interaction were coded as eight micro themes. These themes are listed next, with accompanying examples of positive and negative comments.

Micro theme: Keeps the interaction going, including asking for opinion, clarification, repetition, elaboration and explanation

Positive comments included:

> *C01F asks C01M to expand on that and to explain why she thinks that parks are good idea giving her a chance to develop the topic further.* E1, P1

> *C04D gets 4.5 from me because he keeps the task going. He makes sure all the pictures are being viewed.* E3, P4

> *And asks C07G her opinion there bringing her into the conversation again.* E5, P7

Negative comments included:

> *And C12S has the burden of maintaining and developing the interaction most of the time.* E1, P12

> *And C10O doesn't keep the interaction going, not even with C10J's support.* E1, P10

> *Again C01M didn't really ask her partner for her opinion very much.* E4, P1

Micro theme: Brings the interaction back on track

Comments on a candidate being able to do this were positive, as this was only noted when a discussion went off-task and a candidate was able to proactively orient the interaction back to the task. However, the need to do this may have reflected negatively on the partner who was taking the interaction off-task. Comments included:

> *Very nice. I love the way C10J's like "oh, yeah, he likes the party too." So bringing it back on task, bringing it back to the present and the house their supposed friend was there with the garden.* E4, P10

> *C02H brings the interaction on track by saying what she believes is useful.* E1, P2

> *And then actually brings C02O back on the topic very well.* E4, P2

Micro theme: Amount contributed to the interaction

Positive comments included:

> *It does take C12S a little bit of time to get started, but once she's done so, she produces a long contribution.* E6, P12

> *So C12K responds at length.* E6, P12

Comparative comments included:

> *C03C contributes more to the interaction.* E1, P3

Negative comments included:

> *And C05L is just agreeing with her, adding in words. So makes it, quite cleverly … look like she's really interacting, but actually she's not really saying much.* E4, P5

> *That's a rather unsatisfactory response from C03J. She doesn't seem to have much to say.* E6, P3

Micro theme: Quality of the contribution, including relevance, substantive engagement with the topic

Positive comments included:

> *C12S's point about international sports events is well made.* E3, P12

> *They do really very carefully consider each of the alternatives.* E3, P5

*I feel that C07G makes very relevant comments.*E3, P7

And C12S gives a really good example about the marathons in Japan. E4, P12

Negative comments included:

A lot of their language is quite descriptive rather than giving their opinions. E4, P5

C05L describes the situation, does not again address the issue of what kind of help the teacher is giving the student. E1, P5

They don't really focus on the task. What they are talking about is just what's in the picture. They are not talking about the aspect of helping other people. E4, P5

Micro theme: Extends own ideas by explaining, elaborating and/or justifying

Positive comments included:

C07A is very good at giving reasons for his opinions and justifying what he thinks. E4, P7

Right, C04S says "it's a good idea". She explains why. E2, P4

In C06N's turn, she describes two of the pictures and gives quite clear reasons why she believes that these are important. E3, P6

Negative comments included:

C02O doesn't give any reason why it might be particularly useful for a student, but she likes it. E3, P2

OK, so C08M doesn't really develop the point, just introduces it and passes over his partner. E4, P8

But C02O expects C02H to give reasons and develop the topics further. E1, P2

Micro theme: Extends the scope of the interaction beyond the task

Positive comments included:

Both in fact make one attempt to widen the scope. Once when C03C asks C03J about dancing. Once when C03J says "I used to do that like a child". E2, P3

Here again both of them introduce their experiences, [what C03J had as] a little girl, and [for] C03C, the fact [that] they don't have this in Holland, turning this into a genuine interaction in that they are not only dealing with the prompts provided by the examiner. E1, P3

It's genuine interaction in the sense that they are not only dealing with prompts that are listed … but also ask a side question like "Have you done this before?". E1, P3

Negative comments included:

No real attempt to widen the interaction at any point. E2, P2

There is no attempt to widen the scope of the interaction in any way. E2, P5

Micro theme: Use of functional and formulaic language, including linking words and cohesive devices

Positive comments included:

> *C01M says that she agrees with C01F. Probably she's learned the formula to agree because immediately she introduces a "but", with another idea.* E1, P1

> *So C10J actually says "let's start with this one", "what do you think about this shoes and gloves?" so I think, believes, I think she's been, may have been trained and done a course and actually understands what the task requires.* E3, P10

> *C06N's attempting to supply extension to justify her decision that things do help people in the city through the use of "because".* E6, P6

Negative comments included:

> *However, C04S introduces objections three times by means of "but".* E1, P4

> *There C07A's throwing in a phrase that he's learnt "I totally agree with you", but a little bit inappropriate there. It's very artificial.* E2, P7

> *C06P invites C06N to give her own thoughts with a rather inadequate "you?". This is not a terribly appropriate way of initiating.* E6, P6

Micro theme: Turn-taking, including inviting partner to take a turn, ability to initiate a turn, hold on to a turn, take the floor from a partner when necessary, and/or use intonation to facilitate turn-taking

Positive comments included:

> *C06N does not give up her turn easily. She lengthens vowels and words "we", "see" and also uses a lot of rising intonations "dancing" and "cafeteria" and "flowers" to show that she is holding onto her turn.* E1, P6

> *Both of them take turns smoothly.* E1, P3

> *C04D asks C04S questions and endeavours to bring her into the conversation.* E6, P4

> *Once again they toss the ball to and fro between them and there is an agreement. They each put in some new ideas and C04D ends the interchange with a very nice "yes, exactly."* E6, P4

Negative comments included:

> *C04D's not very sensitive to a rather shy partner and he even interrupts C04S once.* E1, P4

> *And there is a long pause that C12K doesn't take the opportunity of grabbing the turn.* E1, P12

> *C11J doesn't appear to be letting his partner in at this point.* E4, P11

> *C07G doesn't say anything, but maybe she hasn't got the opportunity to because C07A's over-extending his turn a little bit and speaking at length here as he did with the first topic as well.* E4, P7

Table 7 summarises positive and negative aspects of these micro themes.

Table 7: Maintains and develops the interaction: corresponding positive and negative features noted

Features	Positive	Negative
Maintains and develops the interaction	Seen to be active and effective in both maintaining and developing the interaction	Requires support/relies on partner to maintain and/or develop the interaction
	Extends own idea by explaining, elaborating, justifying and/or providing examples	Provides noticeably brief/minimal responses that do not effectively develop the interaction and/or do not provide reasons for a response
	Carefully considers all points and substantively engage with the topics and task	Describes rather than give opinion/analyse/discuss/persuade
		Responds in ways that are not relevant to partner's point and/or task
		Responds with points that are illogical and/or contradictory
	Brings the interaction back on track when necessary	Dominates the interaction, interrupting etc and making it difficult for partner to fully participate
	Actively invites partner in by asking for opinion	Takes an overly passive role and not asking partner questions
	Effectively turn-takes, sharing the floor	Engages in extended turns that are monologic, rather than dialogic
	Uses a range of functional language appropriate to interaction	Not using a range of appropriate functional language and/or overuses formulaic expressions

Macro theme 4: Negotiates towards an outcome

Examiners commented positively on candidates who took a proactive role in working with the partner towards a joint decision, which might involve inviting the partner to make a choice. Openness to the partner's views and a willingness to compromise when appropriate were viewed positively. Specific ways of negotiating towards an outcome noted by examiners included rounding up the points discussed, evaluating and comparing the advantages and disadvantages of different ideas, narrowing down the options available, and, when needed, referring to and clarifying what the task requires. Examiners noted when candidates discussed individual items or ideas without comparing or prioritising them to help work towards a decision and when they started negotiating towards an outcome prematurely, i.e. before many of the ideas had been discussed or their partner had contributed to the discussion on the ideas.

Micro theme: Summarises own and/or partner contributions to facilitate outcome

Positive comments included:

> *And rounds up the exchange by commenting on C01M's contribution.* E1, P1

> *Giving C06N's ideas about which two activities would be the most important and developing the interaction and saying why she thought those two things are the most important.* E5, P6

Negative comments included:

> C10O, instead of making any further comment or any extended comment about what C10J says. He returns to the barbeque and says that he prefers the barbeque because you can have parties. E3, P10

Micro theme: Explicitly negotiates toward an outcome, using specific language

Positive comments included:

> Again, [C03C asks] "which one do we end up with?" pushing towards the outcome. E2, P3

> But anyway C03C then starts to wrap up, so she asks the decision question "which one we should go for?" E4, P3

Negative comments included:

> They don't really negotiate towards an outcome. So they don't really show that type of language. E4, P5

> OK, so C06N goes straight to the final decision making question which is "which two things are the most important?". And her partner has not even said anything yet about any pictures. So that was really an inappropriate jump and quite strange to just ignore the pictures in front of them, not actually discuss any of them at all, but just go to the decision which should be coming at the end. E4, P6

Table 8 summarises positive and negative aspects of these micro themes.

Table 8: Negotiates towards an outcome: positive and negative features noted

Features	Positive	Negative
Negotiates towards an outcome	Explicitly and effectively negotiates towards an outcome, using appropriate language	Does not attempt to negotiate towards an outcome; does not understand task
	Able to summarise, evaluate and prioritise points raised in the discussion	Leaves the negotiation of the outcome to their partner; adopts an overly passive role
	Understands the most effective time in the interaction to begin to negotiate towards an outcome	Begins to negotiate towards an outcome before all items have been discussed; does not understand task
	Able to persuade partner through explaining choices	Will not compromise or consider partner's choices; leaves partner with little choice but to accede

Macro theme 5: Extent to which support is needed

Examiners view it positively when a candidate is seen to need little or no support or prompting from the partner or the examiner to engage in the interaction and complete the task. Key to this was the extent to which a candidate required support for the interaction to continue. Support/prompting is seen as needed when a candidate takes a passive role, contributes only by responding and relies on the partner to keep the conversation going.

Examiners positively evaluated the following ways of providing support to a partner: supplying a word/phrase to help complete an utterance when it is obvious that the partner is struggling; pointing to a picture as a way of inviting the partner to make comments; and helping the partner to extend an idea by asking him/her to give reasons; and repeating or rephrasing the task question to clarify what the task requires of them.

Micro theme: Needs support from either partner or interlocutor/examiner

Comments on the extent to which support was required included:

> *And C07G didn't require any support.* E6, P7

> *C10J kept the interaction going with very little prompting and support.* E5, P10

> *C01M manages to maintain the interaction with some support from C01F.* E1, P1

> *And C08G maintains and develops the interaction, but needs the support from his partner.* E1, P8

> *And C12K probably attempts to help her partner by pointing to one picture.* E1, P12

> *C04S's struggling a little bit with the language here, but C04D's really helping her, really supporting her with his, the way that he's kind of filling in the gaps with what she's trying to say. He's reading between the lines. This is very good, I think, in terms of interaction.* E4, P4

> *C07A was struggling. He wasn't sure what to say and C07G could've intervened and finished the sentence, but didn't.* E2, P7

Micro theme: Provides support for partner

Comments on the provision of support for the partner included:

> *C06P's helping C06N through the interaction.* E3, P6

> *They don't need any prompting. They are kind of supporting each other.* E4, P9

> *There was a good one from C04D there. C04S was struggling "because… you can can…" he gives "talk to each other". He provides the end of the sentence for her.* E2, P4

> *With enthusiasm, supporting C04S. Sometimes her coherence is a bit lacking, but C04D really focusing on what she's saying, what the task is and moving it forward all the time step by step.* E4, P4

> *And C05C's able to pick up where C05L is a little weaker.* E3, P5

Table 9 summarises positive and negative aspects of these micro themes.

Table 9: Extent to which support is needed: positive and negative features noted

Features	Positive	Negative
Extent to which support is needed/provided	Noticed to require little or no support to engage in the interaction/complete the task	Noticed to require support from partner or interlocutor to engage in the interaction/complete the task
	Provides support to partner; encourages, asks questions, provides words/sentence completion where necessary, prompts partner	

Macro theme 6: Interactive listening

Examiners viewed it positively when candidates displayed interest in what the partner has to say and thus show listener support. Listener support strategies noted by examiners were both verbal and non-verbal and included: back-channelling to show support for the partner to continue talking; nodding; smiling; and looking at the partner. Examiners also commented positively on candidates demonstrating interactive listening by developing the partner's ideas in the next turn and by asking follow-up questions or reasons for an opinion, which provides evidence that the candidate has listened attentively to the partner's talk. Examiners valued the listener's manner of giving the partner time to formulate ideas, rather than interrupting or finishing each other's talk prematurely. Examiners commented negatively on candidates who focused primarily on introducing his/her own ideas and appeared to listen only for the opportunity to take the next turn to speak, rather than engaging in the partner's ideas. General positive comments included: 'I think C04D was a very sympathetic listener and a very supportive listener' (E4, P4); 'C01F comes straight back with "why do you think that, actually?" This is really good interactive communication. It shows she's been listening' (E6, P1); 'Giving C04S plenty of space to say what she wanted to say' (E4, P4).

Micro theme: Back-channels to indicate support

Positive comments included:

> *C03J shows that she is listening to her partner by acknowledging and providing back-channelling quite often.* E1, P3

> *C04S shows that she's actively listening to C04D by nodding and by providing back-channelling ("yeah, yeah"), and commenting briefly on what C04D has said.* E1, P4

> *And C09M is obviously listening, says "yeah, yeah".* E4, P9

Negative comments included:

> *The body language is very very static. No "yes, yes".* E2, P7

Micro theme: Noted to be concentrating on what partner says

Positive comments included:

> *C08G has been listening attentively to C08M, has been making eye contact, and also nodding to show that he is in fact listening.* E1, P8

> *C08M occasionally looks at him, but has a kind of way of bowing his head so he's listening very carefully to what C08G said.* E2, P8

> *So C08G's in agreement and he's listening carefully. He looks with interest in what C08M is pointing at.* E2, P8

> *C12S's indicating by nodding and looking that she's listening very carefully.* E2, P12

Negative comments included:

> *So they seem to be having this conversation when they are not really listening to each other very well.* E4, P7

Table 10 summarises positive and negative aspects of these micro themes.

Table 10: Interactive listening: positive and negative aspects noted

Features	Positive	Negative
Interactive listening	Demonstrates active listening through being noted to listen carefully, including nodding	Seems to be more focused on what they want to contribute rather than listening to their partner's views
	Gives partner time to frame contributions	Does not give partner space to talk
	Uses back-channelling to indicate comprehension, agreement and/or interest	Does not give back-channelling

Macro theme 7: Body language

Examiners positively evaluated candidates who used body language appropriately to perform a range of interactional functions. Examiners noticed: nodding or smiling to show listener support (as exemplified in the above discussion on Macro theme 6: interactive listening); using gestures for emphasis; and using body language with verbal cues to facilitate turn-taking or to express agreement. While making appropriate eye contact with the partner is important in showing the candidate's engagement in the interaction, examiners considered it problematic if a candidate looks at the examiner/interviewer or at the pictures most of the time. Examiners also noticed when candidates displayed an expressionless face or did not nod or smile at all, which could suggest boredom or a lack of interest. Furthermore, they noted when a candidate used body language to replace talking altogether.

Micro theme: Eye contact

Positive comments included:

C07A makes eye contact with C07G to invite her. E1, P7

C01M is looking at C01F, nodding her head occasionally, seems taking notice of her. E2, P1

C04D has a good way of asking C04S's opinion. He kind of bends down and looks up at her so that there is very clear body language that it's her turn and he's asking for her opinion. E2, P4

Negative comments included:

C11W never makes eye contact with C11J and C11J attempts to make eye contact with the interlocutor. E1, P11

Both people are staring at the pictures and not at all looking at each other. E2, P11

Perhaps C08G stares at a little bit too fixedly at C08M. E2, P8

Micro theme: Nods to indicate comprehension and/or agreement, signal end of turn

Positive comments included:

C05L participates by nodding and by saying something. E1, P5

E12S's indicating by nodding and looking that she's listening very carefully. E2, P12

And nods at C12K to emphasise what she's saying. E2, P12

Negative comments included:

There is no nodding. The body language is very very static. E2, P7

Micro theme: Smiles and/or laughs to indicate agreement, interest and/or rapport

Positive comments included:

Got very positive body language, smiling, looking at each other, rocking in and out of the pictures rather than sitting stiffly there. They are moving. E2, P3

And in order to bring C06N back to the conversation, she [C06P] turns to her [C06N] and smiles. E3, P6

Negative comments included:

No smiling. E2, P7

Micro theme: Points to picture and/or task

Positive comments included:

> *And probably attempts to help C12K's partner by pointing to one picture.* E1, P12

> *Natural way to change the subject [from C03J] "I like this picture" and pointing.* E2, P3

> *They are quite good at pointing at what they are talking about.* E2, P8

Negative points included:

> *C12K guides C12S to the next picture by pointing to it. C12K doesn't have any verbal response, doesn't give any verbal cuing.* E3, P12

Micro theme: Positioning of body

Positive comments included:

> *Although they focus very much on the pictures, they are actually showing interest in the pictures by leaning into them.* E2, P3

> *C09J uses arm gestures to emphasise it.* E2, P9

Negative comments included:

> *C01F is kind of listening to C01M, occasionally looks, but spends lots of time staring at the pictures.* E2, P1

> *Again they are not looking at each other, but they are leaning in and looking very much towards the pictures.* E2, P3

Table 11 summarises positive and negative aspects of these micro themes.

Table 11: Body language: positive and negative aspects noted

Features	Positive	Negative
Body language	Indicates interest in partner's contributions and/or comprehension through appropriate body language, including eye contact, smiling and nodding	Shows boredom or disinterest in partner's contributions and/or the task through negative body language, including facial expression
	Directs partner to a picture through pointing, in order to help interaction	Points to pictures rather than use appropriate functional language
		Looks at the examiner, prompts or pictures rather than making eye contact with partner

Macro theme 8: Rater reflection, including the manner of interacting and how 'natural' the interaction is perceived to be

Examiners commented positively on students who interact with the partner confidently and with ease. They also commended students who can take the lead when necessary, but share the conversation and not dominate. Examiners noticed when a candidate is rather passive, or hesitant in taking their turn.

Examiners commented on the extent to which the interaction seems natural. Examiners view it positively when the language and interactional manner of the candidates resemble those in everyday conversation, and when they show a genuine interest in exchanging ideas with each other. A less preferable interaction is one which sounds artificial or unnatural. Examiners noted when the talk sounded as if it has been rehearsed or when students orient towards parallel interactional patterns, focusing on delivering their own ideas in lengthy turns but not engaging with each other's ideas.

Examiners also reflected on the proficiency level of candidates, in terms of their ability to participate in the task, the impact of pairing, and the impact of viewing the performance for a second time.

Micro theme: Extent to which interaction seems natural, genuine, authentic

Positive comments included:

> *So they are scoring very well for interactive communication. I think this is because their conversation is very natural. The flow of the conversation between them is very natural.* E3, P2

> *And C04S speaks over C04D in agreement. Very natural.* E2, P4

> *So they actually start off a really nice way, very collaborative, obviously working together in a very nice and natural way for this level.* E4, P4

> *Again very naturally interweaving their contributions together.* E4, P3

Negative comments included:

> *They do the task quite systematically, but the interaction I think is quite unnatural. They don't really appear to be engaging very well with each other.* E4, P6

> *It's not a really interactive sort of conversation. It's more sort of lengthy turns.* E4, P7

> *That sounded very artificial. The intonation. It's clearly a phrase C07G learned. She doesn't at all sound natural or comfortable to levering it. This is a negative aspect.* E6, P7

Micro theme: Manner of interaction

Positive comments included:

> *C07A responds confidently. He initiates confidently.* E1, P7

> *Both candidates interact with ease.* E2, P3

I think C04D was a very sympathetic listener and a very supportive listener and sharing the conversation in a very equal sort of way, not domineering at all, giving C04S plenty of space to say what she wanted to say and for both to comment on each other's ideas, so very good. E4, P4

Negative comments included:

C04D introduces the topics and he can initiate, but not fully appropriately because he's not very sensitive to a rather shy partner. E1, P4

C10O methodology of approaching the task is somewhat, is an individual methodology. He's working on his own. He's not really working cooperatively with C10J. E3, P10

C05C tends to be quite dominant and has a tendency to finish C05L's utterances for her. So that's not terribly appropriate actually. E6, P5

C06P's just literally throwing it back at her in a quite abrupt, almost unfriendly way. E4, P6

C12S's somewhat quiet and hesitant. E6, P12

Micro theme: impact of viewing the performance a second time

Comments included:

Having listened to it again, I probably change my mark, my mark for C03J for a 4 cause it is C03C who actually develops the interaction most of the time. Both of them are good. E1, P3

I think C03C seems to be slightly stronger. So I might amend my marks to a 4 for C03J instead of a 5, having watched it again. E4, P3

I'm wondering if I was a little bit over generous with their marks. Maybe 3.5 for both. They were pretty much the same. E4, P8

Micro theme: proficiency levels of candidates, in terms of ability to participate in the task

Comments included:

I feel that C01F is able to control the interaction better than C01M. And I think … this is probably a result of C01M not being strong linguistically. I know we are only looking at initiating and responding and we are not looking at grammar and vocabulary etc., but because she's not so strong linguistically, I think … she seems to find it harder to actually make, sort out the interaction. E3, P1

C12S takes the lead in this one despite having quite limited language and interactive resources. E4, P12

Micro theme: Impact of pairing

Comments included:

> *C01F is a strong candidate at the level. She might have done better with a stronger candidate.*
> E1, P1

> *I think C07A is good if he had a strong candidate, perhaps he would be able to interact more fully.* E1 P7

> *C08G, on the other hand, needs support. He can't develop the interaction without C08M's help very confidently.* E1, P8

> *It is really the limitations of C06N's language that makes this test very very difficult from an interactive perspective.* E3, P6

> *So the interaction in this test is a good level of interaction between two fairly similar candidates, candidates whose interactive communication skills while are not identical, are of very similar nature.* E3, P8

Table 12 summarises positive and negative aspects of micro themes relevant to candidate interaction.

Table 12: Rater reflection: positive and negative aspects noted

Features	Positive	Negative
Manner	Demonstrates assertiveness; interacts with ease and confidence, able to take the lead where necessary	Dominates his/her partner; takes over the discussion
	Co-constructs the interaction in a manner which seems natural	Seems noticeably hesitant, stilted, artificial; relies on partner to take the lead

This section has thus far elaborated on the macro and micro themes identified from the 72 sets of examiner comments. To summarise, as expected, trained examiners focused on criterion aspects of the performance in their summary statements and stimulated verbal recalls. These aspects included a candidate's ability to initiate discussions, introduce new ideas, respond appropriately, link contributions to those of other speakers, maintain the interaction, develop the interaction, negotiate towards an outcome, and the extent to which support was needed.

The examiners also noted a range of additional aspects of the performance, including body language, interactive listening, assertiveness, the extent to which the interaction appeared to be 'genuine', and the (over) use of formulaic expressions. Examiners reflected on the impact of viewing the performance for a second time and the extent to which a candidate's performance may have been impacted by their partner. Table 13 below provides a summary of the macro and micro themes presented in this section.

Table 13: Summary of macro and micro themes

Criterion features	
Macro theme (code)	**Micro theme (code)**
Initiates discussions, introduces new ideas (IN)	• *Starts discussions (IN-S)* • *Introduces/contributes new ideas/topics, shifts topics (IN-I)*
Responds to partner (RP)	• *Responds appropriately to partner, including politeness, ability to agree and/or disagree (RP-A)* • *Links contributions to those of partner; expands, extends partner's ideas (RP-L)*
Maintains and develops the interaction (MD)	• *Keeps the interaction going, including asking for opinion, clarification, repetition, elaboration, explanation (MD-K)* • *Amount contributed to the interaction (MD-A)* • *Quality of contributions, including relevance, substantive engagement with topics (MD-Q)* • *Extends own idea by explaining, elaborating and/or justifying (MD-J)* • *Extends the scope of the interaction beyond task (MD-E)* • *Use of functional/formulaic language, including linking words, cohesive devices (MD-F)* • *Turn-taking: including inviting partner to take a turn, ability to initiate a turn, hold on to a turn, take the floor from partner when necessary, use intonation to facilitate turn-taking (MD-T)*
Negotiates toward an outcome (NO)	• *Summarises own and/or partner contributions to facilitate outcome (NO-S)* • *Explicitly negotiates toward an outcome (NO-E)*
Extent to which support is needed (SN)	• *Needs support from either partner or interlocutor/examiner (SN-N)* • *Provides support for partner (SN-P)*
Non-criterion features	
Macro theme (code)	**Micro theme (code)**
Interactive listening (IL)	• *Back-channels to indicate comprehension and/or interest (IL-B)* • *Noted to be concentrating on what partner says (IL-C)*
Body language (BL)	• *Eye contact (BL-E)* • *Nods to indicate comprehension and/or agreement, signal end of turn, and so forth (BL-N)* • *Smiles and/or laughs to indicate agreement, interest and/or rapport and so forth (BL-S)* • *Points to picture and/or task (BL-P)* • *Positioning of body, leans towards picture and/or partner (BL-L)*
Rater reflection (RR)	• *Extent to which interaction seems natural, genuine, authentic (RR-N)* • *Manner of interaction, including 'interacts with ease', confidence, assertiveness, hesitation etc. (RR-M)* • *Proficiency level of candidate, in terms of ability to participate in the task (RR-P)* • *Impact of paring, extent to which a candidate's performance may have been impacted by partner (RR-I)* • *Impact of viewing the performance for a second time (RR-S)*

Following the coding and analysis of data from the verbal reports, the examiner recommendations to candidates were coded and analysed. The findings are presented in the next section.

5.4.3. Examiner recommendations for candidates

The examiners selected for the study were also experienced teachers. After examiners had generated their verbal report on a particular paired interaction, they were asked to offer advice to the candidates on how to improve their performance. From the examiner recommendations, which were based on features noted by examiners, 17 themes emerged. While these broadly reflected the macro themes previously identified by the examiners, the category of 'approaching the task' emerged as a distinct area of advice for candidates.

Table 14 contains the key areas of advice for candidates, examples of examiner suggestions and, where possible, a link to the macro themes which have been previously identified from the verbal reports.

Table 14: Examiner advice to candidates

Focus of recommendation	# of comments	Example of examiner suggestion for each category	Link to macro themes*
Approaching the task	21	*I would suggest going through the different prompts … taking their time to exhaust one topic before they pass onto the next.*	Not linked
Introducing new topics	23	*[Candidate] in general should have initiated more by making suggestions.*	IN
Developing own ideas	19	*For [Candidate], I would say she needs to focus more on the task, give more justifications for her opinions so that she's developing her language.*	MD
Asking partner questions	30	*She needs to ask questions. She needs to involve her partner.*	MD
Responding to partner	38	*And I would tell [Candidate] to develop more confidence and try to link her ideas to her partners'.*	RP
Developing partner's ideas	16	*But I think [Candidate] in particular needs to be able to build on, in fact, both of them need to be able to build on what the other has said rather than just moving on to the next topic.*	MD
Quality of contribution	15	*[Candidate], I think, needs to think a little bit more before he speaks. He gives the impression of thinking on the go and just carrying on and on and on until he runs out of breath, metaphorically speaking. I think he needs to tighten up his utterances, to police what he's saying and not just talk for the sake of it.*	MD
Quantity of contribution	14	*I think one of the things that you would need to emphasise is that to get a good interactive communication score, you really need to share the task with your partner in a much more positive way than [Candidate] is doing. She's really being directed most of the time by [Candidate].*	MD
Maintaining own turn	4	*I would say she needs to be a bit more forceful, so her partner doesn't keep on interrupting or finishing her sentences for her. So she needs to try her turn rather than letting it go all the time. She needs to try and keep going, give the description of the picture and then give the opinion and then ask her partner what she thinks.*	MD
Keeping the interaction going	17	*Both of them need to find a way to be able to pass on the turn. You can do that through intonation. You can do that by looking at the person. But they don't make any use of that. Pushing the paper over is not a very successful means of saying "it's your turn".*	MD

Use of functional language	21	*Maybe she needs to think more about how to use negotiating type of language and also just some more phrases for the functions that she needs to talk about: agreeing, disagreeing, deciding, concluding, all of that sort of language was quite missing really.*	MD
Use of conversational strategies	3	*Also maybe to just use more conversational strategies like "argh, that's interesting" or "well, we could say that." Just to make the whole thing sound more natural so that the turn taking is more obvious and more conversational rather than just one person then the other person then one person then the other person.*	MD
Negotiating towards an outcome	21	*He maybe could have done more of [a] roundup, try to go back to the topic and finish it off properly, which would be the most successful [way of] getting people to know each other, which they didn't actually come to a conclusion about. So that could be his point to work on really is getting the decision making part in as well as the rest of the topics, but actually the task doesn't need them to do that anymore in the current task because it is split into two phases, so it's not absolutely necessary to do that anymore.*	NO
Interactive listening	29	*I would tell [Candidate] to be more sensitive to his partners, just not only invite them to contribute, which he does well, but also give them time, some more time.*	IL
Body language	22	*I would also encourage them to make eye contact. If their attention is fully taken by the pictures, then they miss the point of the interaction.*	BL
Manner of contributing to the interaction	33	*And it would obviously help her if she had a partner who was less dominant, but her hesitancy about providing her opinions and her willingness to simply allow her partner to speak are not strong features of interactive communication. She needs to be more assertive, to say what she wants to say, to perhaps tell her partner "wait a minute. Let me speak."*	RR
Creating a 'natural' interaction	17	*They use fixed expressions which they've learned off by heart, but fairly inappropriately. And whether that kind of expression [is one] that people would naturally use in an informal conversation [of] this type is open to debate. So I think there has to be very careful selection of which phrases you teach people to use with work on the context.*	RR

*Macro theme abbreviations: IN – Introduces discussions, introduces new ideas; RP – Responds to partner; MD – Maintains and develops the interaction; NO – Negotiates towards an outcome; SN – Extent to which support is needed; IL – Interactive listening; BL – Body language; RR – Rater reflection

Recommendations to candidates were wide-ranging. Key themes included the need to: make eye contact and use a range of effective body language; engage in active listening; engage substantively with topics; develop the confidence to introduce new topics; ask your partner questions to show that you can initiate; learn how to 'hold the floor'; move away from overly formulaic expressions; and ensure that you negotiate towards an outcome. It should be noted that certain features that examiners value in the performance and thus inform their suggestions to candidates – including appropriate body language, assertiveness, and effective turn-taking – could be seen as reflecting Anglo-American conventions (Fulcher 2003). The explicit valuing of these features by examiners demonstrates the co-constitutive relationship of language and culture.

The findings from the analysis of the coded verbal report data and examiner advice to candidates formed the basis for the draft checklist.

6   Phase 2: Developing a draft checklist and accompanying materials

6.1.   Methodology

The examiner comments data gained in Phase 1 informed the development of a draft checklist and feedback for learners. This data included a) the examiners' comments on the IC features they attended to while rating the 12 video performances, and b) their recommendations for the learners. As detailed in Section 5.3.3, the six examiners' comments were transcribed and thematically analysed with NVivo 11. The comments were coded into eight macro themes and over 50 positive/ negative features, which formed the basis of the IC checklist.

The first version of the IC checklist was drafted by listing the salient features within each of the eight main categories. Particular attention was paid to establishing the corresponding positive and negative performance features of the same aspect of interaction as reflected in the examiners' comments, for example:

a) Take the initiative or show willingness to start vs. Wait passively for the partner to start.

b) Agree by giving more than a token response, extending where appropriate vs. Give only minimal or token responses to what the partner has said.

In so doing, users of the checklist can have a clear idea of 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' with reference to a particular aspect of interaction.

Since the checklist is aimed at teachers as users, the accompanying description elaborates on the positive and negative features in each main category. This was drafted through identifying recurring comments from the examiners, giving more specific details of the performance features salient in the examiners' comments. Example phrases (e.g. 'Shall I start?', 'Perhaps you're right, but…') were also drawn from examiners' comments, or retrieved from the candidate discourse transcripts corresponding to the relevant examiners' comments.

The feedback section drew on the NVivo analysis of recommendations given by examiners as well as built on the description, simplified and reworded to tailor to learners as the intended readership. The 'Well done!' sub-section gives due credit for the positive features learners have displayed in that category, and encourages them to keep incorporating those features in their paired interactions. It also outlines ways in which they can further enhance their performance. The 'Needs more work' sub-section helps learners identify problematic aspects of performance in a category and outlines ways to improve their performance, together with some useful phrases they could draw on. Both sections are drafted in keeping with the learning-oriented assessment principles (Jones and Saville 2014) of raising learners' awareness of success criteria, and giving feedback that helps learners identify their current level, the next level, and how to get to this level.

The checklist and accompanying descriptions and feedback were then sent to two senior members of Cambridge English who specialise in speaking assessment. Based on their written comments and a Skype discussion with them, the research team made iterative revisions to the draft checklist. Most of the suggestions related to enhancing the practicality and usefulness of the checklist and

accompanying materials, by making the wording of the checklist and descriptions more user-friendly and adding more example phrases to learners. Some suggested changes were on a larger scale, for example, concerning the structure of the checklist.

Although each of the suggested modifications was thoroughly discussed and more than half of the suggestions were incorporated, no major changes were made at this point. Since this research valued an evidence-based approach to the development of the IC checklist and accompanying materials, it was agreed that all relatively major changes suggested at that stage would be shared in the focus group discussion with teachers in Phase 3, and that decisions would be made after gathering feedback from teachers.

6.2.   Draft checklist, descriptions and feedback for learners

The resulting draft checklist at this stage contained the following eight macro themes and various positive and negative features as specified in the last two columns of Table 15.

Table 15: Structure of the draft checklist and accompanying materials

	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 an outcome	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

One of the key issues discussed by the research team is the difficulty for teachers to attend to so many positive and negative features under each macro theme. In addition to the heavy cognitive load imposed on teachers, it is unlikely that all features identified are present in one interaction. It was therefore decided to include only two tick boxes (one positive and one negative) per macro theme per candidate.

Table 16 illustrates the format of the checklist, descriptions and feedback. Although this may not be the most practical or useful format to be used in classroom or assessment settings, it was thought to be desirable to present all three components together horizontally, so that the focus group participants in Phase 3 can go through the macro themes one by one and see the extent to which the three components are coherent.

Corresponding positive and negative aspects were placed next to each other (e.g. a) positive and d) negative). L refers to the learner on the left and R refers to the learner on the right. Descriptions were provided in bullet point format to unpack the checklist items, but the bullet points do not

necessarily correspond to the positive and negative aspects in the checklist in the same order. Sometimes, a general statement is given in the first bullet point, followed by more specific explanations and/or example phrases that would reflect positive features.

Table 16: Format of the draft checklist, descriptions and feedback for learners

					Macro theme		
Positive			*Negative*			*Description*	*Feedback*
a) positive	L	d) negative	L				**Well done!** →
	☐		☐		• Description		feedback comments
b) positive		e) negative			• Description		
	R		R		• Description		**Needs more work** →
c) positive	☐	f) negative	☐				feedback comments

7 Phase 3: Piloting the draft checklist and accompanying materials (focus group discussion)

In Phase 3, the draft checklist and accompanying materials were piloted with four language teachers in order to understand the applicability and usefulness of the developed materials, and to inform further revisions and refinements of them. This section details the methodology employed in this phase, followed by main findings and then modifications to the checklist and accompanying materials based on the findings of this phase.

7.1. Participants

In the final phase of the project, four language teachers (Teacher ID: T1–T4), who had taught *Cambridge English: First* preparation classes and interactional speaking skills in other settings, participated in a focus group discussion. The four teachers had a wide range of experience in terms of teaching, examining and developing testing/teaching materials for interactional skills, as documented in Table 17.

Table 17: Teaching and testing experience of the Phase 3 participants

Teacher ID	EFL/ESL teacher (years)	Teaching FCE* prep classes (years)	Teaching IC skills (years)	FCE examiner (years)	Developing IC testing materials (years)	Developing IC teaching materials (years)
T1	22	6	22	0	2	22
T2	40	30	30	25	10	20
T3	15	10	15	10	25	15
T4	13	1	13	1	2	13
Mean (SD)	22.5 (12.3)	11.8 (12.7)	20.0 (7.7)	9.0 (11.6)	9.8 (10.8)	17.5 (4.2)

*FCE = *Cambridge English: First*

The participants had been informed about the aim of the project and their tasks, and signed consent forms, prior to their participation.

7.2.   Data collection: Focus group discussion

The piloting was carried out through focus group discussion. Two of the researchers were present in the focus group session, in order to facilitate and take detailed notes of the discussion.

The focus group proceeded as follows. After a short presentation of the project background and the rationale for this research, the participants had 30 minutes to familiarise themselves with the draft IC checklist and accompanying materials. Initial impressions on the materials were briefly discussed and some clarification was made at this stage. The four teachers then watched six video performances (two high-scoring, two mid-scoring, two low-scoring), and they each rated the six video performances while using the checklist. For each of the videos, they were asked to do the following individually:

- while watching a video, use a highlighter to mark the checklist items you have observed

- after watching, apply ticks (for your overall judgement of each area)

- check if the descriptions and feedback comments corresponding to your ticks are relevant.

After each video, the facilitator gave the participants three questions to discuss, in terms of actual applicability of the checklist items and accompanying materials:

Q1. Did you find any checklist items hard to apply?

Q2. How many ticks were you able to apply while assessing a paired performance (any checklist categories to be merged or separated?)

Q3. Do you have any suggestions to improve the checklist, descriptions and feedback comments?

The four participants then participated in a semi-structured focus group discussion for one hour. The list of questions prepared for the focus group is presented in Table 18. These questions related to the applicability and usefulness of the checklist and accompanying materials. Some of the questions had already been fully covered in the earlier part of the session, so the discussion here focused only on the questions we had not covered earlier.

Table 18: Questions for the semi-structured focus group discussion

Questions on the checklist items	
Q1	Could you please share your experience of applying the draft checklist?
Q2	Is the number of the main categories manageable? What are your views on…
	a. Collapsing maintain and develop interaction?
	b. Interactive listening moving to maintain and develop interaction?
	c. Cut out manner of interaction?
Q3	Is the number of the sub-categories manageable?
Q4	Were there any omissions, in terms of categories or sub-categories that you expected to find, but were not in the checklist?
Q5	How many ticks do you think teachers can apply?
Q6	Any checklist items particularly hard to interpret or apply? Why?
Q7	Is the level of detail provided in positive and negative aspects appropriate and helpful?
Q8	Any suggestions for changing the order of presentation (main and sub-categories)?
Q9	Any other suggestions for changes?
Questions on the descriptions	
Q10	General comments on the draft descriptions?
Q11	Is the level of detail provided in the descriptions appropriate?
Q12	To what extent do you think teachers will find the description useful in understanding the checklist items?
Q13	To what extent do you think teachers will find the descriptions and phrases provided useful in teaching each IC aspect to learners?
Q14	Any suggestions for changes to enhance the effectiveness of the descriptions?
Questions on feedback comments to learners	
Q15	General comments on the draft feedback comments?
Q16	Is the level of detail provided in the feedback comments appropriate?
Q17	Is the tone of the feedback comments appropriate?
Q18	Do you think learners will feel encouraged by the feedback comments?
Q19	Do you think the feedback will help learners progress in their interactional skills?
Q20	Any suggestions for changes to enhance the effectiveness of the feedback?

There were also eight specific questions that originated from the discussions with two senior members of Cambridge English as noted in Section 6.1. The numbering in the following list refers to the initial draft, not to the final checklist in Appendix 5.

1. *(1.1d): Start the discussion in an abrupt way* – Is the meaning of 'abrupt' difficult to pinpoint, and is there a clearer way to express this?

2. *(1.2b): Initiate a new topic after the current topic has been thoroughly discussed* – Is 'thoroughly discussed' too subjective? (But quantifying it may involve technical concepts and is not sensitive to the interactional context.)

3. *(2a and 2e): Do both initiating and responding vs mainly initiate but not doing much responding* – Under which macro category, 1 or 2, should this pair of positive and negative features go?

4. *(3.1): Maintain the interaction and (3.2) Develop the interaction* – Should these two sub-categories be collapsed into one category?

5. *(3.3) Using appropriate functional language* – Should this be integrated into 3.1 or 3.2 rather than exist as a separate sub-category?

6. *(6b) Demonstrate they have been listening carefully/attentively through extending or developing partner's topic and (6e) Seem more focused on what they want to contribute rather than listening to their partner's ideas or views* – Should these features be included only in Macro theme 3 (Maintain/develop the interaction), or are they worth being included as a feature under Macro theme 6 (Demonstrate interactive listening)?

7. *(4d) Show an openness to partner's views and willingness to compromise and (4h) Show a lack of willingness to compromise or consider partner's choices* – Should these features be part of what is assessed and be included in the checklist?

8. *(8) Interact confidently and naturally* – Should this be a separate category on the checklist, put under other categories, or omitted altogether?

7.3.   Data analysis

The two researchers who were at the focus group session took detailed notes of the discussion. The whole session was also audio-recorded, so that the researchers could go back to the recording when any parts of the notes needed to be revisited for accuracy. Based on the detailed notes, the key suggestions by the four teachers were tabulated under four headings: 1) Overall changes, 2) IC feature categories, 3) Feedback, 4) Suggested deletions. The research team then carefully discussed each of the suggestions, agreed on how to respond to each issue and the rationale for each decision was noted.

7.4.   Results

7.4.1. Suggestions from teacher focus group

Table 19 outlines the main changes suggested by the focus group participants, the research team's response, and the rationale for actions taken (where relevant).

Table 19: Suggestions from teacher focus group

Focus group comments/ suggestions	Researchers' response	Rationale
Overall changes		
A long checklist puts high demand on teachers' processing capacity.	We developed a concise IC checklist for real-time classroom assessment.	Different roles can be played by the long and short versions (described below).
For each checklist statement, describe the positive feature, with the options Yes/No/ Maybe.	We adopted this format in the concise IC checklist. We keep the original format in the full version of the checklist. The 'Maybe' option was thought to be unnecessary, since if teachers are unsure, they can leave the checklist item unticked, which would mean 'Maybe'.	The Yes/No format helps teachers process the IC checklist more efficiently in real-time assessment. The separate positive/negative features in the full version give a more precise description of the features and are reflective of the examiners' original comments.
Binary choices may sometimes be irrelevant or difficult to pinpoint.	We made clear in the checklist instructions that they do not need to tick every box.	

IC feature categories		
Combine the two sub-categories 'maintain the interaction' and 'develop the interaction'.	The two sub-categories were combined in the concise version, but kept separate in the full version.	The examiners do see these as separate categories, as reflected in their comments, and the recommendations to candidates for the two aspects are different.
Combine the main categories 'interactive listening' and 'body language'.	The two are kept as separate categories.	While body language could be used to display interactive listening, it could be deployed for other interactional functions. Interactive listening could also be displayed through means other than body language.
Functional language is relevant to different categories rather than only 'maintain and develop interaction'.	This is now a new macro category in the full version, and a sub-category within all categories (except body language) in the concise version.	
Feedback		
More examples of fixed phrases or formulaic language can be added to the feedback.	More example phrases have been added to the feedback for each category. Learners can use these phrases for various functions in the interaction (e.g. to introduce new ideas, to invite the partner to say more).	
Suggested deletions		
'To both initiate and respond' in category '2. Respond to partner'.	Excluded from the checklist statement but retained in the description.	This is to keep the categories of 'initiating' and 'responding' more clearly separate, while highlighting that learners need to strike a balance between both in the interaction.
'Interact confidently and naturally', as this could be difficult to assess.	The category is kept in the full version, and subsumed within '2. Keep the discussion going over several turns' in the concise version.	The checklist is mainly for learning-oriented feedback (rather than testing), and these are relevant and important aspects of interactive communication.
'Steer the interaction in the right direction'. 'Show willingness to compromise'. 'Require support from partner or examiner'.	These are omitted in the concise version, but kept in the full version of the checklist	These are features salient to the examiners as emerging from the NVivo analysis.

As noted in the table, the checklist, description and feedback were revised, taking into account the suggestions by the four teachers. Some elements were kept to preserve the integrity of the findings from the thematic analysis of examiners' comments. A concise version of the IC checklist and accompanying feedback to learners (see the next section) was also created in accordance with the suggestions by focus group participants.

7.4.2. Developing a concise version of the IC checklist

The initiative for developing a concise version of the checklist was derived from the focus group's insight that the full version could be useful for teaching and planning of teaching, as teachers can focus on one or two categories in each lesson, but it would put too much processing demand on teachers/raters for examining students in real time. A concise version of the IC checklist was therefore developed, with the aim of allowing teachers to use it for assessing students' interactional performance within the paired task in real time within the context of classroom assessment.

The concise version of the IC checklist (see Table 20 and Appendix 6) has four main categories instead of nine, but includes features (a–m) extracted from all nine categories in the full IC checklist.

Table 20: Main and sub-categories in the concise version of the IC checklist

The student can…	*Interaction strategies*
1. Initiate new ideas	a. **New ideas:** Take initiative to contribute relevant new ideas b. **Right time for new ideas:** Contribute new ideas after the current idea has been adequately discussed c. **Language:** Use a range of appropriate language to initiate new ideas and/or shift from one idea to another
2. Keep the discussion going over several turns	d. **Develop (own idea):** Extend your own ideas sufficiently e. **Develop (partner's idea):** Extend the partner's ideas by linking their own contribution to the partner's and giving more than just a token response f. **Invite:** Actively invite your partner if needed (e.g. asking questions, helping complete a sentence where necessary, prompting partner to say more) g. **Listen:** Show listener engagement through back-channelling and short responses (e.g. 'exactly', 'right', 'OK') h. **Be collaborative:** Keep a natural and collaborative flow to the interaction (e.g. no long pauses within/between turns, no dominating interruptions) i. **Language:** Use a range of appropriate language (e.g. agreeing, disagreeing, explaining, elaborating, justifying, providing examples)
3. Negotiate towards an outcome	j. **Joint decision:** Proactively work towards making a joint decision (e.g. inviting the partner to make a choice, showing willingness to compromise) k. **Language:** Use a range of appropriate language (e.g. summarising, evaluating, comparing, prioritising points raised in the discussion)
4. Use body language appropriately	l. **Body language**: Use appropriate body language (e.g. nodding, smiling) to show interest in your partner's contributions and/or signal change of speakers m. **Eye contact:** Keep eye contact with partner

These components were selected based on the number of examiner comments received in Phase 1, and what the four teachers in Phase 3 found most useful and applicable when they used the checklist to rate six paired performances. Table 21 presents how the concise version corresponds with the full version of the checklist.

Table 21: Correspondence between the full and concise versions of the checklist

Category in the full checklist	Features in the concise checklist
1. Start the discussion and contribute new ideas	Take initiative to contribute relevant new ideas Contribute new ideas after the current idea has been adequately discussed
2. Respond to partner	Extend the partner's ideas by linking their own contribution to the partner's and giving more than just a token response
3. Maintain and develop the interaction	Extend your own ideas sufficiently Actively invite your partner if needed…
4. Negotiate towards an outcome	Proactively work towards making a joint decision
5. Need or provide support	…e.g. asking questions, helping complete a sentence where necessary, prompting partner to say more
6. Demonstrate interactive listening	Show listener engagement through back-channelling and short responses
7. Use body language	Use appropriate body language to show interest in your partner's contributions and/or signal change of speakers Keep eye contact with partner
8. Use effective functional language for interaction	Use a range of appropriate language to initiate new ideas and/or shift from one idea to another Use a range of appropriate language (e.g. agreeing, disagreeing, explaining, elaborating, justifying, providing examples) Use a range of appropriate language (e.g. summarising, evaluating, comparing, prioritising points raised in the discussion)
9. Interact confidently and naturally	Keep a natural and collaborative flow to the interaction

The full version of the IC checklist is tailored for more detailed diagnostic assessment as well as for teaching and learning, focusing on one or two main categories at a time (e.g. Week 1 – starting the discussion and contributing new ideas; Week 2 – responding to the partner; Week 3 – maintaining and developing the interaction). The final version of the full checklist and accompanying materials is included in Appendix 5.

8   Discussion

With the aim of developing a LOA tool that teachers can use to give feedback to learners on their interactional skills, this research has gathered 72 sets of verbal reports from six experienced *Cambridge English: First* examiners on the IC features taken into account in their judgement of learners' IC skills and recommendations for the learners to improve their IC skills. The examiner comments and suggestions were thematically analysed and informed the development of the IC checklist, accompanying descriptions and feedback for learners. The draft LOA tool was then piloted with four teachers to investigate its applicability and usefulness, and their feedback was used to further refine it. This section discusses main findings from this three-phased research, while answering the three research questions posed in Section 3.

RQ1: Which features of IC are salient to the *Cambridge English: First* examiners who are also experienced teachers, when they award scores for the *Cambridge English: First* paired speaking task?

Examiners attended to both criterion and non-criterion features of IC, as evidenced by the mentions of these features in their comments and recommendations to candidates. The criterion features were captured in themes 1 to 5, and non-criterion features in themes 6 to 8. Table 15 (reproduced here) shows the Macro themes 1 to 8, and the number of positive and negative features (micro themes) within each macro theme.

Table 15: Structure of the draft checklist and accompanying materials

	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 an outcome	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

While eliciting these empirically-driven IC features, variations in the conceptualisation of IC were noted. As the research team went through different stages of the analysis, such as analysing examiners' verbal reports, analysing the focus group discussion, and drafting and revising the IC checklist, it emerged that there are interesting variations in how the examiners, the teachers in the focus group, and the research team conceptualise IC: while the macro categories of IC features identified are broadly in agreement, variations exist in how we interpret each category and its nature, the relationship between categories, and where particular features (micro categories) belong.

Maintaining and developing the interaction was a macro feature highly salient to the examiners – it had the highest number of coded examiners' comments among the eight themes. While it exists as

a single criterion feature within the *Cambridge English: First* Speaking test rating scale descriptors, some examiners viewed them as separate/separable aspects of IC, as evidenced in comments such as 'She did maintain, and to some extent, developed the interaction' and 'She maintains the interaction, but she doesn't really develop it in any way'. As noted in Section 5.4.2, examiners seem to view *maintaining the interaction* as mainly about involving the partner and sharing vs. dominating the discussion, while they view *developing the interaction* in terms of sustaining and extending a topic with relevant talk. In alignment with the examiners' views, the research team was able to identify features which contribute to maintaining the interaction, e.g. actively inviting the partner in by asking questions; and features relevant to developing the interaction, e.g. explaining, elaborating, justifying and/or providing examples. As such, maintaining and developing the interaction are presented as two sub-categories of Macro theme 3 on the IC checklist, and specific descriptions and feedback are provided on each aspect.

There was a suggestion by focus group members that the categories 'interactive listening' and 'body language' be combined for ease of processing the IC checklist. After revisiting the respective examiners' comments on each category and discussing the nature of the two features among the research team, we maintained that 'interactive listening' and 'body language' are related, yet distinct, IC features. Interactive listening could be displayed or evidenced by body language (e.g. eye contact, nodding), but also through other means such as back-channelling or developing partner's ideas, and it also concerns whether the candidate gives the partner time to formulate and express his/her ideas. In a similar vein, body language can be used to display interactive listening, but also performs a range of other interactional functions, e.g. signalling turn-taking, displaying agreement/disagreement.

We also found that some particular features/actions could have membership in more than one macro category. A prime example is the action of 'developing partner's ideas' (vs. giving minimal, token responses). It plays a role in the quality of 'responding to partner' (Macro theme 2), is relevant to 'developing the interaction' (Macro theme 3), but can also serve as evidence of 'interactive listening' (Macro theme 6). While this yielded a few overlapping micro categories in the full version of the IC checklist, it reflects the complex and interwoven nature of the IC construct features.

RQ2: How can these features inform the development of a practical checklist of IC?

The eight themes summarised in Table 15 on page 47, together with the themes which emerged from examiners' recommendations for candidates, informed the development of the IC checklist and the accompanying description for each macro category. To make the checklist comprehensive and user-friendly, the checklist was structured to contrast the corresponding positive and negative performance features of the same aspect of interaction as reflected in the examiners' comments. It was hoped that this format would facilitate the checklist users' understanding of 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' with reference to a particular aspect of interaction.

In developing the checklist, striking an optimal 'balance between construct coverage and [teacher/examiner] usability' (Galaczi, Lim and Khabbazbashi 2012) was found to be particularly important. The multi-faceted and interwoven nature of the IC construct features as noted above had implications for the development of the IC checklist. In the course of drafting the IC checklist and accompanying descriptions and feedback, the research team aimed at a comprehensive coverage of the IC construct features to faithfully reflect the examiners' comments but, more importantly, in light of the fact that some features are not readily captured by the rating scale descriptors, and learners may not get feedback on their performance with regards to these features. However, as the teachers in the focus group rightly pointed out, the full checklist (even without the accompanying description and

feedback) would place heavy processing demands on teachers using it in assessing students' paired task performance in real time.

Taking into account their comments and suggestions, the research team decided to develop a concise version of the checklist. This concise version of the checklist is one-page long by design: it combines the nine macro categories into four, and condenses each pair of positive/negative features into a single statement, with the options 'Well done!' and 'Needs more work' for the teacher to select. Such a design facilitates teachers' use of the checklist for real-time classroom-based assessment of students' IC performance. The full version of the IC checklist, with a more comprehensive construct coverage, could be used for more detailed diagnostic assessment as well as for teaching and learning, where teachers can focus on one or two main categories at a time (e.g. Week 1 – starting the discussion and contributing new ideas; Week 2 – responding to the partner; Week 3 – maintaining and developing the interaction).

RQ3: Once the relevant features are identified, how can they inform the development of meaningful feedback to learners?

The examiners who participated in Phase 1 were also experienced teachers, and they offered a number of useful suggestions to the candidates on how to improve their IC performance. Their advice was sorted into 17 categories, and as summarised in Table 22, broad synergy was found with the macro themes identified by examiner comments on IC features.

Table 22: Examiner advice to candidates

Focus of recommendation	# of comments	Link to macro themes *
Approaching the task	21	Not linked
Introducing new topics	23	IN
Developing own ideas	19	MD
Asking partner questions	30	MD
Responding to partner	38	RP
Developing partner's ideas	16	MD
Quality of contribution	15	MD
Quantity of contribution	14	MD
Maintaining own turn	4	MD
Keeping the interaction going	17	MD
Use of functional language	21	MD
Use of conversational strategies	3	MD
Negotiating towards an outcome	21	NO
Interactive listening	29	IL
Body language	22	BL
Manner of contributing to the interaction	33	RR
Creating a 'natural' interaction	17	RR

* Macro theme abbreviations: IN – Introduces discussions, introduces new ideas; RP – Responds to partner; MD – Maintains and develops the interaction; NO – Negotiates towards an outcome; SN – Extent to which support is needed; IL – Interactive listening; BL – Body language; RR – Rater reflection

The feedback sections of both the full and concise IC checklists drew on the thematic analysis of recommendations as well as built on the description, simplified and reworded to tailor to learners as the intended readership. In the full version, the feedback for learners appears in the far right column within each category (see Appendix 5). In the concise version, the feedback is located on two separate pages following the checklist (see Appendix 6), and can be read side-by-side with the checklist itself. Particular attention was paid to offering positive feedback to those who achieved certain IC features as well as providing suggestions on how to improve their IC skills for those who still 'need more work'. In doing so, it was hoped that both 'Well done!' and 'Needs more work' sections would raise learners' awareness of success criteria, and provide feedback that helps learners identify their current level, the next level and how to get to this level. For example, under '2. Keep the discussion' in the concise version, one of the feedback comments for a learner who 'Needs more work' is:

> **Develop (own idea):** It is important **not** to state your choice (e.g. 'I think a café is good.') or simply describe an idea or picture and stop there. Next time, try to extend your ideas by giving reasons for your choice, giving examples, or providing more details.

This helps the learner to identify issues in the current performance (stating a choice or describing a picture only), and gives recommendations for a 'next-level' performance (extending own ideas by giving reasons or examples). In a similar vein, for learners getting 'Well done!' under '1. Initiate new ideas', the feedback comment reads:

> It is great that you bring new ideas into the discussion. To do this even better, make sure you think about 1) *when* to bring in a new idea (has the last one been fully discussed?), 2) *how* to introduce it, and 3) *how relevant* it is to the task.

Thus, the feedback helps the learner recognise what s/he has done well (bringing new ideas into the discussion) and how s/he can achieve the next level (initiating a new idea that is timely and relevant). Of course, the precise feedback to individual learners can be adapted by the teacher in accordance with their actual performance.

The only one exception where synergy was not found between examiner comments on salient features and examiner advice was 'approaching the task', which emerged as a distinct area of advice for candidates. Examiners' suggestions in this category included:

> *I would tell both candidates to look at the different prompts and try to say as much as they can about each prompt before trying to decide on which one is the most important or which they like best.* E1, P6

> *The advice one could give to candidates in this situation to improve their interactive scores would be not to describe all the pictures in one go or just look through and talk about them as a bunch, but try to describe one picture, discuss one of the pictures, one of the situations and then throw this over to the partner for discussion so that there would be more of [an] initiating, responding, initiating, responding, adding pattern.* E3, P6

> *They could spend more time on each picture and go into more detail and just make their contributions more extensive. So they have more content to talk about really.* E4, P3

After a discussion within the research team, it was thought better not to highlight these comments as a distinct category of feedback for learners. Some of these comments were very task-specific and do not seem relevant when the developed tool is used outside the *Cambridge English: First*

preparation context. Some also sounded more like test-taking strategies rather than enhancing learners' IC skills per se. Also, most recommendations classified into this category were to some extent covered in several other themes of examiner suggestions, such as 'introducing new topics', 'developing own ideas', and 'developing partner's ideas'. Although the suggestions coded under 'approaching the task' were more of macro nature, it was thought that more specific advice might be useful for learners.

Furthermore, to increase the practical value of the LOA tool, especially of the feedback section, a major change was made to its overall structure. Based on the strong suggestion by the focus group teachers on the significance of providing a distinctive piece of advice on learners' 'use of effective functional language for interaction', the category was moved from a micro category (under maintaining and developing the interaction) to a macro category, to reflect its relevance throughout the interaction. Adding this category on functional language makes the total number of macro categories nine. In the concise version, a subcategory on the use of relevant functional language was added to all categories except body language.

9   Conclusions

This study was the first to attempt to bridge theoretical and descriptive discussions on IC and its practical usefulness in testing and teaching. By developing an easy-to-use LOA tool for IC skills, it is believed that this research has contributed to the area of meaningful feedback on IC to learners, helped teachers to more deeply understand the construct of IC, and argued for the integration of learning and assessment in meaningful and innovative ways.

The checklist and accompanying descriptions and feedback developed using an empirically-driven approach can benefit Cambridge English stakeholders and the field of language testing in several ways:

- provide *Cambridge English: First* **candidates** (and candidates taking other paired speaking tests) with feedback on strengths and weaknesses of their IC performance, during their test preparation processes

- provide **teachers** of *Cambridge English: First* preparation classes (and teachers teaching interaction skills in general) with the means to provide LOA in the context of development of IC skills

- provide **learners** with a self-assessment and peer-assessment tool which can support the development of their interactional skills

- provide the **Cambridge English learning management system in Empower** with a systematic way to generate and record feedback on students' IC performance, which has not yet explored the Cambridge English LOA approach.

- provide **ELT content writers** with an empirically-based set of IC features which can be integrated in relevant coursebooks.

In addition, the findings could contribute to enhancing the scoring validity of the operational Cambridge English paired tests. The checklist could be used to:

- raise examiners' awareness of macro and micro IC features during **training/standardisation**, and ensure that their focus is upon the IC aspects that the task is designed to assess

- enhance **examiners' confidence** in awarding IC scores

- provide additional scoring validity evidence on IC ratings, which Cambridge English can use as **a posteriori validation evidence** as well as for **quality assurance purposes**

- feed into further **revisions/refinements of IC scales**.

It is also noteworthy that the study outcomes can, by extension, also be applied to *Cambridge: Preliminary* and *Cambridge English: Advanced* (now known as C1 Advanced), as the *Cambridge English: First* scales cover B1 to C1 levels. Additionally, the approach taken in this research could be expanded to other speaking sub-skills (e.g. discourse management) and other CEFR levels in the future. Extending this line of research to cover a range of proficiency levels would be especially valuable, in line with the recent changes made to the CEFR, focusing more on 'Interaction' and 'Turn

taking' (Council of Europe 2018). In addition, very few studies have investigated IC skills across proficiency levels (Galaczi 2014 being one of the few), and so further in-depth development of the body of empirical insights about IC skills across proficiency levels would be beneficial for teachers, learners and test developers.

The findings also have broader implications for teaching and testing learners' interactional skills. It is believed that this research contributes to a definition of the IC construct and clarified what can actually be practically evaluated in real time by examiners and teachers. The findings will benefit not only teachers and learners in test preparation classes, but also in L2 speaking classes that are not test-oriented. The complementary roles of the full and concise versions for teaching and real-time assessment to cater for teachers' and students' needs is particularly noteworthy (i.e. the full version to be used for classroom teaching, and the concise version for classroom assessment). Furthermore, as exemplified in the development of the concise version of the checklist, this tool can be flexibly adapted to support teachers and students in different teaching and testing contexts. For example, a promising step to take is to see how educational technology can be harnessed for teachers to apply the checklist and deliver the relevant feedback to learners electronically. A further exciting possibility is the use of the macro- and micro-level insights gathered in this study in the development of technology-supported dialogue systems which engage learners in simple dialogues and provide feedback on their interactional skills.

Based on the findings of this study and the materials developed, we have the following suggestions for future projects that can build on and extend this line of research further.

a) A resource bank of worked examples illustrating IC features

Firstly, in the course of developing the IC checklist and accompanying materials, the research team identified several positive and negative IC features which learners would benefit from the feedback the most if the features were illustrated in their interactional contexts, for example:

- What does it mean when candidates are said to engage in parallel monologues?

- What would count as helping the partner complete a sentence and what would be an interruption?

- When is it (in)appropriate to use expressions such as 'I couldn't agree more'?

Such a resource could assist the learners in understanding the feedback, so that they would not adopt the suggestions out of context. Teachers and learners could also analyse the example interactions as a learning activity in class, developing learners' ability for self- and peer- assessment of IC performance.

This follow-up study has been taken up by one of the researchers of this project, funded by the Cambridge English Funded Research Program Round 8 (for more details, see Lam 2018b).

b) The use and usefulness of the IC checklist tool in language classrooms

Another logical follow-up of the present study is to investigate how teachers use the IC checklist, the accompanying descriptions, and the feedback for learners both in the context of teaching IC and

in classroom-based assessment. A combination of classroom observation, teacher questionnaire and/or interview, and learner questionnaire may help us better understand the usefulness of the materials, the different ways in which teachers and learners engage with the materials, and any useful modifications to make to the checklist, descriptions and/or feedback for learners.

It would also be valuable to carry out research using a pre- and post-test design, to examine the extent to which this tool is actually useful to enhance learners' IC skills.

c) IC checklist for other languages/contexts

Finally, the research team believe that the development of IC is important not only when learning English, but other foreign languages as well. At the plenary talk to a language teaching conference where one of the researchers presented the IC checklist developed in this study (Nakatsuhara 2017), several teachers of modern foreign languages in the audience already expressed interest in using the IC checklist for the languages they teach. Some modifications might be necessary to make the checklist suitable for individual languages (e.g. taking cultural aspects underpinning turn-taking, body language and pragmatic aspects into account), and it would be worthwhile to trial the checklist with other languages to examine the extent to which IC skills are universal across different languages.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Examiner background/feedback questionnaire

Thank you very much for your expert input to the research project.

1. BACKGROUND DATA

NAME: _____

Years of experience as an EFL/ESL teacher? …………………years…………………months

In your experience of EFL/ESL teaching, approximately how long have you taught test preparation classes? …………….. years ……….months

Please describe any teaching experience that you feel is relevant to your assessment of IC.

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Years of experience as a Cambridge English: First (FCE) examiner?
………………… years…………………months

Years of experience as a PSL? ………………… years…………………months

Please describe any experience with *Cambridge English: First* and/or other Cambridge English examinations relevant to your assessment of IC (e.g. contributed to the development of the original IC scale, involved in the production of standardisation videos)?

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2. FEEDBACK

Having finished viewing and commenting on the 12 video clips and making recommendations to the candidates, please provide any additional comments/suggestions, for example, regarding:

a. the usefulness of the current IC scale and possible improvements that you would like to suggest,
b. candidates' IC performance elicited in the paired task,
c. how easy/difficult it is to provide separate IC scores to paired candidates when the performance is co-constructed by both candidates?

Appendix 2: Transcription notation

(Simplified from Atkinson and Heritage 1984, Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998)

Pauses or gaps (.)	An untimed short pause. Number of dots indicates relative length of the pause. For timed pauses, number within brackets is in seconds, e.g. (1.5)
Colon :	A lengthened sound or syllable; more colons prolong the stretch
Dash -	A cut off, usually a glottal stop
.hhh	Inhalation, number of 'h's indicates relative length
hhh	Exhalation, number of 'h's indicates relative length
hah, huh, heh	Laughter
(h)	Breathiness within a word
Punctuation	Intonation rather than clausal structure; a full stop (.) is falling intonation, a question mark (?) is rising intonation, a comma (,) is continuing intonation
Equal sign =	Latching of successive talk, of one or more speakers; no interval between utterances
Open square bracket [	Beginning of overlapping talk
Degree signs ° °	Stretch of talk quieter than surrounding talk
*Asterisks * **	Creaky voice
Empty parentheses ( )	Transcriber's guess of words uttered
Double parentheses (( ))	Description of non-verbal actions or contextual details
Inward arrows > <	Stretch of talk faster than surrounding talk
Outward arrows < >	Stretch of talk slower than surrounding talk
Underlining	A word or sound is emphasised
psk	A lip smack
TSK	A tongue click
Arrow →	A feature of interest to the analyst

Appendix 3: Example paired discussion transcript

Pair 1 - Int: Interviewer, Candidates C01F and C01M (specified as F and M below)

```
 1 Int: Now, I'd like you to talk about something together, for
 2      about two minutes. I'd like you to imagine that a town
 3      wants more tourists to visit. Here are some ideas they're
 4      thinking about, and a question for you to discuss. First
 5      you have some time to look at the task.
 6 ((15.4 seconds silence while candidates look at task prompt))
 7 F/M: Okay
 8 Int: Now, talk to each other about why these ideas would attract
 9      more tourists to the town
10 F:   Well I think all ideas on the uh on the booklet are quite
11      good actually. I think holiday flats will attract more
12      tourists because there're- it's just more space? Uh for the
13      tourists to live in while they're on holiday? And, what do
14      you think about that?
15 M:   Mm well uh I agree with you? But, maybe, providing parks is
16      much better?
17 F:   Mm why do you think that, actually?
18 M:   Mm because I think to spend time in parks are good, with
19      the family
20 F:   Mm. Yeah I think you have- can have a lot of fun in parks
21      though. (      ) very nice picnics with- picnic with your
22      friends or stuff? Yeah that'd be nice. But uhm more shops
23      (.) yeah tha- I think it would be nice cos I think a lot of
24      uh people uh mostly woman like shopping, and I think having
25      a lot of shops (in your town) (.) uh would (.) would be
26      nice for uh the shopaholics? huhhuh
27 M:   Yes. Or I don't know maybe the tourists eh like to spend
28      more time in parks than go shopping? No?
29 F:   Mm maybe if you're kind of a nature person, if you like
30      nature lots, then, parks are probably much better than a
31      lot of shops huhhuh.
32 M:   Mm. Yes.
33 F:   Mm, putting up security cameras? Yeah tha- I think that's
34      really good idea because then the town is safe, and the
35      tourists will feel safe.
36 M:   Yes with the se- with the cameras a- good idea, because (.)
37      uh (..) the people are more safe?
38 F:   Mm hmm
39 M:   than without cameras
40 F:   Yep
41 M:   (or) the people then (.) want to stole
42 F:   Building a lar- nah I don't think building a large night
43      club is uh really a good idea to attract tourists. I don't
44      know
45 M:   It depends the:: age of the tourists, no?
46      (..)
47 F:   YEAH. That definitely. But I don't think
48 M:   No
49 F:   uh it will attract a lot of tourists because of one club. I
50      think
51 M:   Yes
52 F:   it's a combination of several things
53 M:   mm hmm
54 F:   that attract tourists.
55 Int: Thank you. (.) Now you have about a minute to decide which
56      idea would be best for the town.
```

```
57  F:   Okay (.) so what do you think is the (.) best idea for the
58       town to
59  M:   Mm:: I think building holiday flats, maybe?
60  F:   Mm yes? Why do you think that?
61  M:   Mm because all the tourists like to (...) have flats to uh
62       stay?
63  F:   Mmyeah. (But) maybe the parks (.) are just (.) is a better
64       idea to provide because they (.) uh they are really nice to
65       just uh have a walk in and, enjoy the uh nature with your
66       friends and family?
67  M:   Mm- Yes. So, if you like (.) uh providing parks, I think
68       it's a good idea
69  F:   Yeah. I do think that's a good idea.
70       (..)
71  F:   Yeah. And- but also holiday flats I think (.) is a good
72       idea because (.) uhm (..) you have to: you have to have
73       space for the tourists to live in so, if there's no space,
74       there probably won't be a lot of tourist.
75  M:   Mm hmm
76  F:   Yeah
77  Int: Thank you.
```

Appendix 4: Example examiner comments transcribed for NVivo analysis

Examiner E1 comments on Pair 1: Candidates C01F and C01M (specified as F and M in identifiers)

E1-1-GEN

Rating and general comments: The assessor is E1 and the candidates are C01F and C01M. I would confidently give C01F top marks. She initiates and responds appropriately and links her contributions to C01M and she maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome very confidently. C01M, on the other hand, is a weak 3. After a weak start, she changes her topic rather abruptly and introduces her own topic. She manages to maintain the interaction with some support from C01F and she attempts to roundup. She rounds up the discussion herself by saying 'so', 'if you like', parks, 'I think it's a good idea.'

E1-1-(1-14)-F

C01F makes the first move. She shows that she has understood the rubric and says that all of them will be attractive and then focuses on one. There are two instances of rising tone that C01M followed by a very short pause. C01M could have taken the advantage of that to join in, but she doesn't and so C01F asks the question 'What do you think about that?' on an inviting intonation pattern.

E1-1-(15-16)-M

C01M says that she agrees with C01F. Probably she's learned the formula to agree because immediately she introduces a 'but' own with another idea.

E1-1-(17-19)-F

And C01F asks her to expand on that and to explain why she thinks that parks are good idea giving her a chance to develop the topic further.

E1-1-(20-22)-F

And rounds up the exchange by commenting on C01M's contribution.

E1-1-(22-28)-F/M

C01F introduces a new topic on shops and she develops it adequately and C01M says yes. She seems to agree, but goes back to her idea of parks.

E1-1-(29-31)-F

And C01F makes concessions for C01M's idea about parks being a good idea.

E1-1-(32-41)-M

This is C01M's first attempt to develop her topic introduced by C01F, but she adds very little, actually.

E1-1-(42-52)-M/F

And here again, this is the second opportunity when C01M has something to say about the topic that C01F has introduced of night clubs.

E1-1-(53-60)-F

C01F is aware that the development of the interactions very much depends on her ability to get C01M to talk.

E1-1-(61-70)-M

C01M now talks about parks as if it were C01F's idea whereas it was the very [much] her idea from the start.

E1-1-REC

Recommendations:

They make eye contact most of the time and nod. They use body language to show that they are listening. C01F is a strong candidate at the level. She might have done better with a stronger candidate, but she's very good at the level of responding confidently, inviting her partner to give her opinion and expand on her ideas, going back to the topics that C01M has developed. C01M is a very very weak 3. She responds not very confidently and changes the topic and comments very very briefly on C01F's ideas. She warms up towards the end and attempts to round up the interaction.

Appendix 5: IC checklist with accompanying descriptions and feedback for learners (Full version)

Does the learner……? (Please tick (✓) as appropriate. You do not need to tick all boxes if it is difficult to make binary judgments based on observed performances. L indicates a learner on the left and R indicates a learner on the right.)

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 the willingness to start, rather than be hesitant or wait passively for the partner to start speaking. • Moreover, 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 has been adequately discussed) and whether they are relevant to the task are also very important. • There are some useful phrases for shifting from talking about one idea to another, for example: – 'Well, how about _____?' – 'What do you think about _____?' – 'I also think that _____ is good' – (pointing to a picture) 'I also like _____'	**Well done!** → It is great that you bring new ideas into the discussion. To do this even better, make sure you think about 1) *when* to bring in a new idea (has the last one been fully discussed?), 2) *how* to introduce it (e.g. 'well, how about…?'), and 3) *how relevant* it is to the task. **Needs more work** → Try to offer new ideas as well as respond to your partner's ideas. Make sure you also think about 1) whether the new idea is relevant to the task, 2) when to introduce it (has the last one been fully discussed?), and 3) how to introduce it. To introduce a new idea, you can say: – 'Well, how about _____?' – 'What do you think about _____?' – 'I also think that _____ is good' – (pointing to a picture) 'I also like _____'
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 relevant** to the task		**1.2g)** Contributes ideas which do **not** seem **relevant** to the task			
1.2d) Use **appropriate language** to shift from one idea to another		1.2h) Initiate a new idea **abruptly**			

2. Respond to partner?

Positive		Negative		Description	Feedback
2a) Agree by giving more than a token response, **extending** where appropriate	L ☐ R ☐	**2d)** Give only **minimal** or **token responses** to what the partner has said	L ☐ R ☐	• It would be good for students to strike a balance between initiating and responding, not just doing one or the other. • Examiners value students' ability to disagree politely, for example, by prefacing disagreements with some agreement or acknowledgement (e.g. 'Perhaps you're right, but…'), and by giving a reason. • A student does not have to agree or disagree completely. Examiners consider it a positive feature when students explore both sides of an argument (e.g. 'yes, that's a good idea, but…'), or when they show readiness to accept the partner's position after further discussion and justification. • It is better for students not to stop at a token or formulaic response (e.g. 'I agree', 'That's a good idea') but <u>extend</u> it by giving reasons, examples, or more comments. The discussion would be less interactive if a candidate quickly moves on to a different idea and dismisses the partner's idea. • Relatedly, examiners look at whether students link their own contributions to partner's contributions, and develop one another's ideas across turns.	**Well done!** → You did a great job in giving an agreeing/disagreeing response to your partner, and being polite when you disagree. It is good to talk about your partner's idea further (e.g. giving a reason, an example, or further comments) and not just say you agree or disagree. Try to link your own ideas to your partner's ideas, discuss each other's ideas over several turns, and consider both the pros and cons of an idea. Keep up the good work! **Needs more work** → To achieve a successful discussion, it's very important to listen to what your partner says and respond and/or add to his/her idea. Try to balance between offering your own ideas and responding to your partner's ideas. When responding, don't simply say you agree or disagree and stop there. Give a reason, an example, or other comments on your partner's idea before introducing a new idea. Some useful phrases to link your own ideas to what your partner has said are: – 'Like what you said, …' – 'As you mentioned, …' – 'I agree with your idea that …, because….'
2b) Disagree with or challenge the partner **politely** and provide **justification**		**2e) Only** give their **own ideas** and opinions rather than link to what the partner has said (and develop that idea further)			
2c) Link their own **contribution** to the **partner's** (developing an idea across turns)					

3.1 Maintain the interaction?

Positive		Negative		Description	Feedback
3.1a) Actively invite partner in by asking questions	L ☐ R ☐	**3.1c) Dominate** the interaction or often interrupt partner **3.1d)** Take an overly **passive** role	L ☐ R ☐	• One aspect of maintaining the interaction concerns the extent to which candidates invite their partners into the conversation. One way to involve the partner and keep the interaction going is through asking different questions. • Examiners evaluate it positively when candidates ask their partner his/her opinion (e.g. 'What do you think about that?', 'Do you think it's useful?', 'What about _____?'), ask for clarification (e.g. 'Do you mean _____?'), or ask for elaboration or explanation (e.g. 'Why do you think that?'). Asking for explanation/elaboration gives the partner an opportunity to develop the topic further and shows the candidate's interest in what the partner says.	**Well done →** You did a great job keeping the interaction going. We all know that it is important to take turns and share opportunities to speak. It is great that you invite your partner to talk by asking questions! Remember, compared to asking general questions (e.g. 'What do you think?'), asking specific questions is more helpful. For example, you can: • ask your partner's opinion (e.g. 'Do you think it's useful or not?', 'Which one do you think is more important, X or Y?') • ask him/her to clarify (e.g. 'Do you mean…?', 'What did you mean by…?'), or • ask him/her to explain further (e.g. 'You've said X is more important. Why do you think so?')
3.1b) Take turns to speak and **share the floor** with partner		**3.1e)** Engage in extended **monologues**, not sharing the floor		• In contrast, it does little to maintain the interaction if a candidate asks the partner very few questions (or none), and is ready to offer their own ideas or opinions but not involving the partner in discussing these. If both candidates do this, the resulting discussion will sound like parallel monologues, with each candidate introducing their own ideas/topics and not really listening to each other. • Examiners also evaluate it negatively if a candidate dominates the discussion or often interrupts their partner, making it difficult for the partner to participate in the talk and share his/her views; or, in the other extreme, if a candidate is overly passive and not speaking even when invited to or after a long silence. [Specific points for more advanced candidates] • When trying to invite the partner to talk and share his/her ideas or viewpoints, it is important to ask questions which provide the appropriate level of support. A weaker partner may not be able to respond to generic questions such as 'What do you think?' or 'Do you have any (other) ideas?'. Also, remember to strike a balance in trying to help the partner by completing their sentences – it is good to be eager to help, but equally important is being sensitive to the partner, giving them space to say what they want to say.	Also, while helping your partner is important, try not to over-do it. Sometimes, your partner may need a bit more time to say what s/he wants to say. **Needs more work →** Keeping the interaction going is not an easy task! We don't want to be either too active or too passive. Here are a few useful tips: • Don't give long speeches only talking about your own ideas. • Invite your partner to speak by asking their opinions (e.g. 'Do you think it's useful or not?', 'Which one do you think is more important, X or Y?'), or by asking them to clarify (e.g. 'Do you mean…?') or explain their points (e.g. 'Why do you think so?'). • Don't interrupt your partner too often. Take turns to speak. • Say something when invited to speak. Don't be too passive.

3.2 Develop the interaction?

Positive		Negative		Description	Feedback
3.2a) Develop ideas by explaining, elaborating, justifying and/or providing examples.	L ☐ R ☐	**3.2d)** Provide only **minimal** or **brief** responses that do not develop an idea/topic further	L ☐ R ☐	• Examiners look at whether an idea gets developed across turns, and whether it is adequately discussed before students move onto the next. One of the main ways to develop the interaction to be giving reasons for one's choice or opinion. This could be providing reasons to justify a choice (e.g. why an idea/activity/object in a picture is important), or to explain why one agrees/disagrees.	**Well done!** → You have done a good job in developing the interaction and the topics you discuss! As you may be aware, it is better to discuss each idea fully than to move quickly from one idea to the next. The following are different ways of developing an idea. You can check which ones you are already using and try out new ones next time: • give reasons to justify your choice • explain why you agree/disagree with your partner's point • give examples • elaborate on an idea with more details.
3.2b) Carefully consider the points under discussion and contribute responses **relevant** to the topic/task		**3.2e) Only describe** rather than analyse or evaluate in relation to task; move on to a next idea before the current idea has been adequately discussed		• Other ways of developing the interaction include adding information, offering examples, or elaborating on the idea with a few more points. In contrast, the interaction does not get developed if the student states a choice or opinion without giving reasons, or, only gives minimal or brief responses (e.g. 'mm hmm', 'yeah', 'I agree') when responding to the partner. • Another key aspect concerns the quality and relevance of the contributions: Do the students consider each idea/option carefully and from different perspectives? Are their contributions relevant to the current topic and the overall task? Less preferred is talk that focuses too much on describing details in a picture rather than relating it to the task, e.g. merely describing what the people in a	In case the discussion is going off topic or becomes irrelevant to the task, try and bring it back to the right direction, e.g. by highlighting the task instructions. **Needs more work** → In order to develop the interaction, it is important *not* to state your choice or view and stop there (e.g. 'I think a café is good.'), or only give brief responses to your partner's idea (e.g. 'Yes, I agree.'). Next time, try some of the following ways to extend your ideas and responses: • give reasons to justify your choice • explain why you agree/disagree with your partner's point • give examples
3.2c) Steer the interaction in the **right direction** or back on track when necessary		**3.2f)** Respond in ways that are **not relevant** to partner's point and/or task **3.2g)** Respond with points that are **illogical** and/or **contradictory**		picture are doing in the park but not saying why a park will attract tourists or how it will help people enjoy life in the city. • Examiners commend students who show a good understanding of what the task requires and can steer the discussion in the right direction. Less preferable are responses which are irrelevant to the task or the partner's idea. • Some examiners appreciate students trying to widen the scope of the discussion. This is done by personalising the task and relating to their own experience (e.g. asking partner 'Have you done this before?', 'Do you have this in your country?'). However, it is important to not spend too much time on it such that it takes away the focus of the task.	• elaborate on an idea with more details. Also, don't just describe a picture (e.g. what the people are doing in the park) but try and relate it to the task (e.g. why a park may attract tourists). Finally, make sure you and your partner have discussed an idea fully before moving onto the next one.

4. Negotiate towards an outcome?

Positive		Negative		Description	Feedback
4a) Proactively work towards making a joint decision using appropriate language	L ☐ R ☐	**4e)** Take a **passive** role and make little attempt to negotiate towards an outcome	L ☐ R ☐	• An effective performance would involve the student taking a proactive role in working with the partner towards a joint decision, for example, by inviting the partner to make a choice. Some useful language includes: – 'What would you prefer?' – 'Which one do you think is the best/the most important?' – 'Which one should we go for?' • A less effective performance would be if the students do not make a choice or selection among the alternatives, or if they take a passive role in negotiating (e.g. only agreeing but not adding anything). • Specific ways to negotiate towards an outcome include 1) rounding up the points discussed so far, 2) evaluating and comparing the pros and cons of the different ideas, 3) narrowing down the options available, or, 4) when needed, referring to and clarifying what the task requires. Less preferable is when students discuss the individual items or ideas without comparing or prioritising them to work towards a decision. • Students should be careful not to start negotiating towards the decision too soon, for example, when many of the items/pictures have not been discussed, or when the partner has not said much about any of the items/pictures. • Finally, it is important to show an openness to the partner's views, and a willingness to compromise when appropriate, rather than leaving the partner with little choice but to concede or agree with you.	**Well done!** → Great job in taking an active role working with your partner towards a joint decision! It's good to work towards a decision by summarising and evaluating the points discussed so far, narrowing down the options available, and, when needed, clarifying what the task requires. Make sure you start working towards the joint decision at the right time – not too early when several ideas/pictures have not been discussed. Be sure to keep an open mind too – accept your partner's choice if what s/he says is convincing! **Needs more work** → In working towards a joint decision with your partner, there are a few things to remember. Don't leave your partner to do all the work, take a more active role by saying, for example: • 'What would you prefer?' • 'Which one should we go for?' • 'Which one do you think is the best the most important?' To work towards a decision, don't simply describe an idea or picture and stop there. Try to: 1. Summarise the points discussed so far. 2. Evaluate or compare the pros and cons of different ideas. 3. Narrow down the options available. Timing is also important. Don't start making a decision too early, when many ideas/pictures have not been discussed. In the process, make sure you listen and keep an open mind too. Don't force your partner to agree with your choice.
4b) Work towards a decision by **summarising, evaluating, comparing** or prioritising points raised in the discussion		**4f)** Discuss individual ideas/items but make **little attempt** to summarise, evaluate, compare or priortise them			
4c) Begin to **negotiate** towards an outcome at an **appropriate time**		**4g)** Begin to **negotiate** towards an outcome **before** items have been **adequately discussed**			
4d) Acknowledge partner's views and show willingness to **compromise**		**4h)** Show **limited willingness** to compromise or consider partner's views			

5. Need or provide support?

Positive		Negative		Description	Feedback
5a) Require little or no support to engage in the interaction or complete the task	L ☐ R ☐	**5c) Require support** from partner or examiner to engage in the interaction or complete the task	L ☐ R ☐	• Examiners view it positively when a candidate is seen to need little or no support or prompting from the partner or the examiner to engage in the interaction and complete the task. This does not mean candidates shouldn't support each other, but it is about the extent to which support/prompting is necessary for the interaction to keep going. • Support/prompting is seen as needed when a candidate takes a passive role, contributes only by responding, and relies on the partner to keep the conversation going. In some cases, the candidate may be reticent and needs to be prompted to talk (e.g. asked a question; or invited to talk about his/her opinion). • Examiners evaluate positively the following ways to provide support to the partner: 1. When the partner seems to be struggling with word search or expressing an idea, the student supplies a word or helps him/her finish the sentence. This means that the candidate is focusing on what the partner is trying to say. 2. Pointing to a picture as a way of inviting the partner to make comments. 3. Helping the partner to extend an idea by asking him/her to give reasons. 4. Repeating or rephrasing the task question to clarify what the task requires of them.	**Well done!** → You were able to complete the discussion task without needing extra help or prompting from your partner or the examiner. As you may already be doing, try and provide support to your partner if necessary. For example: 1. Help your partner express himself/herself, by providing a word that s/he is looking for, or helping him/her finish a sentence if s/he is struggling to do so. 2. Point to a picture and invite your partner to make comments. 3. Help your partner say more about an idea by asking him/her to give reasons. 4. Clarify what the task requires by repeating the task question or putting it in your own words. **Needs more work** → It seems that you needed some support or prompting from your partner or the examiner in completing the discussion task. Next time, try and say a bit more about your ideas (e.g. giving reasons or some examples), not only after your partner or the examiner has asked you to. If you struggle to find a specific word, try and express the idea by describing it with other words you know.
5b) Provide support to partner (e.g. encourage, ask questions, provide a word or help complete a sentence where necessary, prompt partner to say more)					

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6. Demonstrate interactive listening?

Positive		Negative		Description	Feedback
6a) Show **listener support** and display **interest** in partner's talk (e.g. through back-channelling, nodding, smiling, or eye contact)	L ☐ R ☐	**6d)** Show **little or no interest** in partner's talk and give little or no listener support	L ☐ R ☐	• Good interactive listening includes displaying interest in what the partner has to say and showing listener support to him/her. Some examples of listener support strategies are: 1. Back-channelling (e.g. 'mm', 'uh huh/ah hah', 'yeah, yeah') to show support for the partner to continue talking. 2. Nodding. 3. Smiling. 4. Looking at the partner. • A student can demonstrate interactive listening also by developing the partner's ideas further in the next turn, e.g. by asking follow-up questions or reasons for an opinion. This provides evidence that the student has listened carefully or attentively to the partner's talk. Less preferred is if a student focuses on introducing his/her own ideas, and listens only for opportunities to take the next turn to speak rather than the partner's ideas. • Relatedly, examiners value the listener's manner of giving the partner time to formulate his/her ideas, rather than interrupting or finishing each other's talk prematurely.	**Well done!** → It's brilliant that you are an active listener! You showed interest in your partner's talk through nodding, smiling, looking at your partner, and by giving mini-responses such as 'mm', 'uh huh' or 'yeah'. Show that you listen attentively also by picking up on what your partner has said and comment/expand on it when you take your turn to speak. Make sure you also give your partner enough time to say what they want to say, and don't cut off their talk. **Needs more work** → In conversations, each person needs to be both a good listener and a good speaker. That means paying attention to what your partner is saying as well as how you can respond. Show you are interested in what your partner says by giving mini-responses such as 'mm', 'uh huh', 'yeah', or by nodding, smiling and eye contact. Listen to your partner attentively, pick up on what s/he has said and comment/expand on it in your turn to speak. Don't just focus on introducing your own ideas. Make sure you also give your partner enough time to say what they want to say, and don't cut off their talk.
6b) Demonstrate they **have been listening** carefully/attentively through extending or developing partner's idea in their next turn		**6e)** Seem more **focussed on what they want to contribute** rather than listening to their partner's ideas or views			
6c) Give partner **time** to express and formulate their ideas		**6f)** Give partner **little or no opportunity** to talk			

7. Use body language? (e.g. eye contact, nodding, smiling, gesturing, body positioning, pointing to a picture)

Positive		Negative		Description	Feedback
7a) Use **appropriate body language** (e.g. nodding, smiling) to **display interest** in partner's contributions, or to signal turn-taking	L ☐ R ☐	**7c)** Show **boredom or disinterest** in partner's contributions and/or the task through negative body language, including facial expression	L ☐ R ☐	• When used appropriately, body language (e.g. eye contact, nodding, smiling, gesturing, body positioning) can perform or support a range of interactional actions. Positive uses of body language examiners notice include: 1. Nodding or smiling to show listener support. 2. Using gestures to make emphasis. 3. Using body language together with verbal cues to facilitate turn-taking or to express agreement. • Conversely, examiners notice it when candidates display an expressionless face or do not nod or smile at all, which suggest boredom or lack of interest. • It is important to remember that body language works best together with verbal expression. It should not be over-used and replace talk altogether to signal turn-taking, agreement, or other interactional functions. • Making appropriate eye contact with the partner is important in showing the student's engagement in the interaction. Examiners consider it problematic if a candidate looks at the examiner/interviewer or at the pictures most of the time. However, there is no need for the student to fix his/her eyes on the partner all the time – it would be awkward and unnatural.	**Well done!** → You are good at using body language to show your interest in what your partner is saying. Keep using appropriate body language (e.g. eye contact, nodding, smiling, gesturing, body positioning) together with your spoken language to: • show interest and support • emphasise a point • express agreement • invite your partner to talk. Using body language naturally and appropriately would make you a more effective communicator. **Needs more work** → You'll be a more successful communicator if you can use body language and facial expressions more effectively. For example, show that you are interested in what your partner is saying through nodding, and smiling (don't look bored!). Maintain appropriate eye contact with your partner, and don't just look at the examiner or at the pictures all the time. However, make sure that you don't rely on body language too much, but *use it together with spoken language* for emphasising a point, expressing agreement, or inviting your partner to talk!
7b) Maintain appropriate **eye contact** with partner		**7d)** Look at the **examiner, prompts or pictures** rather than making eye contact with partner			

8. Use effective functional language for interaction?

Positive		Negative		Description	Feedback
8a) Use a range of **functional language appropriate** to interaction	L ☐ R ☐	**8b)** Not use a range of appropriate functional language and/or **overuse formulaic** expressions	L ☐ R ☐	Examiners look at whether students can use appropriate functional language in interactions. Learning some formulaic expressions is useful for the students, so that they do not rely on non-verbal cues or one-word questions such as 'You?' to signal turn-taking. However, in some contexts, using simpler expressions such as 'yes, exactly' or 'I like that one too' is more natural. A key point for students to remember is appropriate use of functional language. If a formulaic expression sounds rehearsed, artificial, or is used inappropriately (e.g. saying 'I couldn't agree more' but then followed by a counter-argument), it does not give a very good impression.	**Well done!** → You are able to use a range of appropriate functional language to maintain and develop the interaction smoothly (e.g. 'oh yeah that sounds nice', 'let's start from this one'). Just remember to use the right phrase at the right time. For example, 'That's right' or 'Exactly!' may be more natural than 'I couldn't agree more' in some contexts. Make sure you also don't just stop at these fixed expressions or responses, but say a bit more, adding your ideas. **Needs more work** → Fixed expressions for different functions such as responding (e.g. 'I completely agree with you') or inviting others to talk (e.g. 'What do you think?') can be useful. You may want to learn a range of these expressions, as well as when and how to use them appropriately. For example, you wouldn't want to say 'I couldn't agree more' and then give a counter-argument. Make sure you say a little bit more when responding to your partner, not using these fixed expressions only.

9. Interact confidently and naturally?

Positive		Negative		Description	Feedback
9a) Interact with **ease** and **confidence**, able to take the lead where necessary, polite and not domineering	L ☐ R ☐	**9c) Dominate** the discussion, show little sensitivity to partner and willingness to cooperate; or is too **passive** and **hesitant**	L ☐ R ☐	• Examiners comment positively on students who interact with the partner confidently and with ease. They also commend students who can take the lead when necessary but sharing the conversation and not domineering. In contrast, examiners advise students not to dominate the discussion, or get through the task on their own without cooperating with their partners. However, examiners also notice it when a candidate is rather passive, or hesitant in taking their turn to speak.	**Well done!** → You look confident and at ease, and the interaction between you and your partner looks natural. The best manner of interaction is a balance between taking the lead when needed and sharing the conversation with your partner. Remember not to dominate the discussion and give your partner few chances to speak, or to ignore your partner's ideas but focus on your own. The interaction looks much better if you both show real interest in talking to each other and what each other has to say.
9b) Co-construct the interaction in a manner which looks/sounds **natural**		9d) Interact in a way that seems **artificial** or unnatural		• Quite often, examiners comment on whether the interaction looks natural or not. Examiners view it positively when the language and interactional manner of the students resemble those in everyday conversation, and when students show genuine interest in exchanging ideas with each other.	**Needs more work** → Taking part in a discussion confidently is important, so try to be less hesitant and more active. Of course, remember also to share the conversation with your partner, not saying too much or too little. For the interaction to be natural, try not to rehearse it too much beforehand. Make sure you listen and respond to what your partner says, not just focus on talking about your own ideas and give long speeches.
				• A less preferable performance would be when the interaction sounds artificial or unnatural. For example:	
				1. When it sounds like the talk has been rehearsed	
				2. When students focus on delivering their own ideas in lengthy turns, but not engage with each other's idea.	

Appendix 6: IC checklist and feedback (Concise version)

Please tick (✓) as appropriate. You do not need to tick all boxes if it is difficult to make binary judgments based on observed performances.

The student can…	Interaction strategies	Learner 1			Learner 2		
		Well done!	Needs more work	Comments	Well done!	Needs more work	Comments
1. Initiate new ideas	a) **New ideas:** Take initiative to contribute relevant new ideas						
	b) **Right time for new ideas:** Contribute new ideas after the current idea has been adequately discussed						
	c) **Language:** Use a range of appropriate language to initiate new ideas and/or shift from one idea to another						
2. Keep the discussion going over several turns	d) **Develop (own idea):** Extend your own ideas sufficiently						
	e) **Develop (partner's idea):** Extend the partner's ideas by linking their own contribution to the partner's and giving more than just a token response						
	f) **Invite:** Actively invite your partner if needed (e.g. asking questions, helping complete a sentence where necessary, prompting partner to say more)						
	g) **Listen:** Show listener engagement through back-channelling and short responses (e.g. 'exactly', 'right', 'OK')						
	h) **Be collaborative:** Keep a natural and collaborative flow to the interaction (e.g. no long pauses within/between turns, no dominating interruptions)						
	i) **Language:** Use a range of appropriate language (e.g. agreeing, disagreeing, explaining, elaborating, justifying, providing examples)						
3. Negotiates towards an outcome	j) **Joint decision:** Proactively work towards making a joint decision (e.g. inviting the partner to make a choice, showing willingness to compromise)						
	k) **Language:** Use a range of appropriate language (e.g. summarising, evaluating, comparing, prioritising points raised in the discussion)						
4. Use body language appropriately	l) **Body language:** Use appropriate body language (e.g. nodding, smiling) to show interest in your partner's contributions and/or signal change of speakers						
	m) **Eye contact:** Keep eye contact with partner						

Feedback for Learners

1. Initiate new ideas

Well done! It is great that you bring new ideas into the discussion. To do this even better, make sure you think about 1) *when* to bring in a new idea (has the last one been fully discussed?), 2) *how* to introduce it, and 3) *how relevant* it is to the task.

Needs more work Try to offer new ideas as well as respond to your partner's ideas. Make sure you also think about 1) whether the new idea is relevant to the task, 2) when to introduce it (has the last one been fully discussed?), and 3) how to introduce it.

Useful Phrases
To introduce a new idea, you can say:
• 'Well, how about _____?'
• 'What do you think about _____?'
• 'I also think that _____ is good'

2. Keep the discussion going

Well done!
Develop (own and partner's idea): Great job in responding to and developing each other's ideas. Well done for doing it over several turns by giving reasons for your choice, explaining why you agree/disagree with your partner, giving examples, or providing more details.

Invite: Excellent work in inviting your partner to talk by asking questions! Remember, compared to general questions (e.g. 'What do you think?'), specific questions are more helpful. It's also good to help your partner when s/he needs it: providing a word that s/he is looking for, helping him/her finish a sentence, pointing to a picture and asking for their opinion, or helping your partner say more about an idea by asking him/her to give reasons.

Show that you are listening: It's brilliant that you are an active listener! You showed interest in your partner's talk through nodding, smiling, looking at your partner, and by giving mini-responses such as 'mm', 'uh huh', or 'yeah'.

Be collaborative: Well done! You developed a collaborative discussion. You gave your partner enough time to say what they want to say, and didn't cut off their talk. You didn't dominate or ignore your partner's ideas.

Needs more work
Develop (own idea): It is important not to state your choice (e.g. 'I think a café is good.') or simply describe an idea or picture and stop there. Next time, try to extend your ideas by giving reasons for your choice, giving examples, or providing more details.

Develop (partner's idea): Similarly, try not to only give brief responses to your partner's idea (e.g. 'Yes, I agree.') and then move on to a new idea. Explain why you agree/disagree, give examples, or elaborate with more details. It is important to link your own ideas to what your partner has said, to show that you have understood his/her talk.

Invite: If you are someone with a lot to say, try not to give long speeches only talking about your own ideas. Invite your partner to speak or say more by asking questions. If you are more of the quiet type, try not to be too passive. Say something when you are invited to speak.

Show that you are listening: Show that you are interested in what your partner says by giving mini-responses such as 'mm', 'uh huh', 'yeah', or by nodding, smiling and eye contact. Listen attentively, pick up on what your partner has said and comment/expand on it.

Be collaborative: It's important to have a collaborative discussion. Don't just focus on introducing your own ideas, but also develop your partner's ideas. Make sure you give your partner enough time to say what they want to say, and don't cut off their talk. Remember also to keep the interaction natural: don't rehearse too much beforehand, share the conversation and don't say too much or too little.

Useful Phrases
To develop ideas:
• give reasons, e.g. 'This, I think, is the most important, because …'
• agree, e.g. 'Yes, that's a good point, because …'
• disagree, e.g. 'I see what you mean, but I don't really agree, because …'

To invite your partner to say more:
• ask your partner's opinion, e.g. 'Do you think it's useful or not?', 'Which one do you think is more important, X or Y?'
• ask him/her to clarify, e.g. 'Do you mean…?', 'What did you mean by…?'
• ask him/her to explain further, e.g. 'You've said X is more important. Why do you think so?'

To link your own ideas to what your partner has said:
• 'Like what you said, …'
• 'As you mentioned, …'
• 'I agree with your idea that …, because….'

3. Negotiate towards an outcome

Well done! Great job in taking an active role working with your partner towards a joint decision! It's good to work towards a decision by summarising and evaluating the points discussed so far, narrowing down the options available, and clarifying what the task requires.

   Make sure you do these at the right time – not too early when several ideas/pictures have not been discussed. Be sure to keep an open mind too – accept your partner's choice if what s/he says is convincing!

Needs more work. Try to take a more active role in working towards a joint decision with your partner. Also, don't simply describe an idea or picture and stop there. Try to summarise the points discussed so far, evaluate or compare the pros and cons of the ideas, or narrow down the options available.

   Don't start making a decision too early, when many ideas/pictures have not been discussed. Make sure you keep an open mind too – don't force your partner to agree with your choice.

Useful Phrases
To work towards a joint decision:
• 'What would you prefer?'
• 'Which one shall we go for?'
• 'Which one do you think is the best / the most important?'

4. Use body language appropriately

Well done! You were great in using eye contact and body language (e.g. nodding, smiling, gesturing, body positioning). This showed interest and supported your partner. You used body language well to emphasise a point, express agreement, or invite your partner to talk.

Needs more work. Try and show that you are interested in what your partner is saying through your body language such as nodding, smiling or gesturing (don't look bored!). Keep eye contact with your partner. Don't just look at the examiner or at the pictures all the time.

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