TOPIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE ENGLISH ORAL PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW FOR INTERNATIONAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines how a topic is initiated and is developed and expanded for additional questions in order to probe an International Teaching Assistant (ITA) candidate's oral proficiency in an unscripted interview test. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) had employed SPEAK (Speaking Proficiency English Assessment Kit), a computer-mediated test, to assess ITA candidates' speaking ability for decades. However, with increasing criticism about the SPEAK in terms of face validity, authenticity and technical problems, a new oral test for ITAs was developed.

The new test, the English Proficiency Interview (EPI hereafter), began to be administered in the Summer of 2010, and is conducted via the format of an unscripted interview. The EPI does not provide an interviewer with pre set questions in advance. Topics are initiated spontaneously the on test site and negotiated in the course of discourse. Questions are formulated based on the response that the test taker had provided during the interview. Thus, each interview in the EPI consists of an individualized form of discourse and has its own path in topic development.

Findings of discourse analysis are presented using 7 EPIs, which were selected from interviews gathered in the first field trial of the new test in 2009. The interview process is illustrated with excerpts taken from actual interviews. Analysis of the data revealed that the interviewer initiated a topic in the following category: a) initiating a topic from the candidate's field of study, and b) initiating a topic from the candidate's interest and life in general. In addition, some features of both conversation and interview are discussed as the EPI is found to have both. Finally, future studies are suggested with reference to topic development across test takers' language proficiency level. This study is primarily descriptive and suggestive rather than conclusive.

To My Family

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

With a significant increase in the enrollment of international students that pursue their academic careers at universities in the US, their opportunities for providing instruction as teaching assistants has become more common. This situation is equally true for the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). As a method of demonstrating oral proficiency of English as an International Teaching Assistant (ITA), either the TOEFL iBT speaking score or the TSE (Test of Speaking English) score were historically required in applying for a teaching assistant position at UIUC. The University had administered the SPEAK[1] (The Speaking Proficiency English Assessment Kit) test for those who wished to be considered ITA candidates but were not able to provide a required score of neither the TOEFL iBT or the TSE to the University. The SPEAK, a machine-mediated test had performed arguably well as a measurement tool of assessing ITAs' speaking ability at UIUC for the past decades. In spite of its merits including high practicality in its implementation, nevertheless, the SPEAK test had been criticized in terms of face validity, authenticity, test security and technical problems. Such criticism drew a mandate[2] for the development of a new oral proficiency test for ITAs among departments, students, and faculty.

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[1] The Speaking Proficiency English Assessment Kit (SPEAK) is an oral test developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), publishers of the Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), an industry standard for assessing English proficiency for non-native speakers. Its aim is to evaluate the examinee's proficiency in spoken English. The SPEAK, which use retired TSE forms (Xi, 2007) is still used for on-campus initial screening for ITAs in other universities, but is being phased out with the launch of the TOEFL iBT test because its test developer, ETS, no longer provides this test. Further information about the SPEAK is described in Chapter 3.

[2] Davidson and Lynch (2002) define it as "combination of forces which help to decide what will be tested and to shape the actual content of the test".

The noticeable drawback of the SPEAK test was that there was no interaction with other speakers during the test because it was delivered by computer. This situation threatened the fundamental problem of test validity because this type of communication—monologue—rarely occurs in a natural conversation. Moreover, the SPEAK test, in particular, did not simulate an instructional setting in which ITAs were most likely to engage, i.e., holding office hours and providing instruction in the classroom. The SPEAK test was less authentic as a screening tool for ITA candidates in that topics and tasks were designed to measure the general language proficiency of nonnative English speakers. In addition, the SPEAK test was administered by means of item pool. Thereby, chances were high that students would be exposed to questions more than once, which would leave test security at risk and open the possibility for test-takers to provide "canned" answer to questions. At the UIUC campus, there were also technical problems in the recordings that could make accurate ratings difficult to achieve, and delay the process of rating performance on the test. Thus, the claim that a computer-mediated test format does not represent the proper and desirable method of assessing speaking ability in a second language received more support from the University. Consequently, the voice of change rose for creating a new and more suitable test.

The newly developed oral proficiency test, the English Proficiency Interview (EPI), at UIUC, is administered by means of a face-to-face interview format. The new test is favored over the machine-mediated test, i.e., the SPEAK or the TOEFL iBT, in terms of interaction because the EPI simulates real-world conversation which involves two parties. This preference was illustrated by the data from the pilot and the field trial test of the EPI, which were conducted in the fall of 2009. Most respondents reported that they preferred the new oral proficiency test (EPI) because there were interactions going on during the test that mirrored authentic

conversation.[3] Respondents added that they could negotiate meaning when communication broke down and hence, they were able to exercise their language ability with less anxiety. The responses support the idea that the interactive aspect of a direct test (such as an interview) enables a rater to assess the test-taker's strategic competence with which they are able to manage and resolve a variety of communication breakdowns. These results ultimately support the claim that direct speaking tests (interview tests) are more valid than machine-mediated, semi-direct tests because the former better engages the learner more in a natural communication (Clark, 1979; Underhill, 1987; van Lier, 1989).

Even with the significant support for direct tests in favor over semi-direct tests as regards interaction, there are nevertheless issues of reliability among test experts with respect to direct oral interview tests. A frequently raised issue with reference to reliability is the issue of interviewer-related factors. For instance, Lazaraton (1996) claimed that interviewers' inconsistent attitude toward test-takers may threaten the reliability of the direct test. Shohamy (1994) also demonstrated a wide variety of topic selections on the interviewers' part in a representative direct test, the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI),[4] by analyzing the task elicitations described in its specifications in terms of functions and topics. Variables of an interviewer's personality, affective status, or fatigue can also affect the test-takers' performance. Other contextual variables such as gender of the assessor and the test-taker, the purpose of their

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[3] The result is from the validity report about the first field trial in 2009 and used with the permission of CTE.

[4] The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview, or ACTFL OPI as it is often called, is a standardized procedure for the global assessment of functional speaking ability. It is a face-to-face or telephonic interview between a certified ACTFL tester and an examinee that determines how well a person speaks a language by comparing his or her performance of specific communication tasks with the criteria for each of ten proficiency levels described in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines-Speaking (Revised 1999). Its procedures and features will be described further in Chapter 2.

interaction, and the relationship between the tester and the test-taker may affect the test-taker's performance, and consequently, his or her score (Shohamy, 1994).

The EPI is composed of two types of interview tasks: term definition questions and impromptu questions. The former asks a student to define specific terms related to his/her field of study; the terms are provided by various academic departments at the UIUC campus. The latter category consists of questions, in general, in relation to the candidate's background, and the questions may vary depending on what the interviewee has said up to a certain point. Both tasks and their subsequent questions differ depending on candidate's response, therefore, those questions take on more features of conversation that are built on an interaction among interlocutors. This facet of the EPI—that each student receives different questions based on information that he/she provides during the test-- reveals the unique feature of 'adaptive questioning'.

The EPI necessarily requires the interviewee's contribution in formulating questions but, at the same time, leaves much to the discretion of interviewers with respect to question development. The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), the test developer and administrator at UIUC, assesses ITA candidates' speaking ability by eliciting language samples using the information provided by the candidates during the interviews. In other words, the EPI requires the interviewer to lead an unscripted interview (except for the term definition), initiating topics and developing them into higher probing questions in order to elicit the candidate's representative language samples. As was revealed above, interviewer variables considerably influence test-takers' performance. Therefore, in an unscripted interview such as the EPI, it would be crucial to secure well-trained interviewers who can lead interview tests in a consistent

and credible way in order to reach a fair assessment of test-taker performance. Details of interviewer reliability and topic development will be described in the next chapter.

In an oral interview test environment, it is important for the candidate to feel comfortable to talk in a conversational manner. In an unscripted oral interview test, in particular, interviewers are required to keep the topic going without much of inter-turn pause and abrupt topic transition which are irrelevant to what they have been talking at the time of dialogue. Such unscripted interview tests as the EPI do not provide agendas to the interviewer in advance and most topics and questions are managed under the interviewer's discretion. In regards to this, there have been substantial studies about topic management style depending on interviewer's transactional or interpersonal propensity, however, there are little investigation about how interviewers initiate topics in an unscripted interview through discourse analysis, which could offer a vivid flow of the topic development during interviews.

Why discourse analysis?

Discourse analysis is adopted as a means of building theoretical rationales for conducting empirical investigation, specifically, and has become a main tool for gathering empirical evidence about the nature of OPI communicative speech events (He & Young, 1998). Schiffrin (1994) asserts that findings in discourse analysis could offer the testing community new and unique ways of investigating the construct validity of a test. The application of various discourse techniques also allow investigators to determine what it is that is measured by a test and what is assumed or claimed to be measured (Johnson, 2001). This methodology has been applied to the OPI data to determine the OPI's major discourse and linguistic features and received recognition as a legitimate method for conducting empirical study about interview format speaking test. For

these reasons, discourse analysis will contribute to the understanding of interviewer's topic development in the EPI.

The present study uses discourse analysis for the benefits above as a method of examining topic development of the EPI. The purpose of this discourse analysis is to observe how an interviewer initiates a topic and crafts interview questions based on the interviewee's responses in order to check language ability and to probe for higher levels of speaker performance. More specifically, the study examined how the interviewer captures a specific topic during the interview in order to develop additional questions. The focus of the study centers on topic development of the test, which entails interaction between interlocutors. Therefore, my study is primarily descriptive and suggestive rather than conclusive.

The following chapter will introduce and describe studies with regard to the oral proficiency interview as used in language assessment.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Assessment of L2 oral proficiency

What is the most valid way of assessing a language learner's speaking ability? In recent decades, direct foreign language oral proficiency that use the format of face to face interview gained a wide popularity (Clark, 1986). In that respect, at present, an interview is likely to be the preferred way of assessing oral proficiency in a second/foreign language context. When an interview is conducted for the purpose of assessing second language speaking ability, it is often referred to as an "oral proficiency interview" (He & Young, 1998). But that term is most likely to be used to refer to the particular kind of interview designed and developed by the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) (He & Young, 1998). For this reason, He and Young (1998) preferred using the term *language proficiency interview*- abbreviated as LPI – in order to refer to any interview used for the assessment of second language speaking ability, including the ACTFL OPI. Likewise, for this research, I would also like to use the term *language proficiency interview* (LPI) in order to refer to language test administered by means of interview format as I agree with their ideas on defining the term. He and Young (1998) define a language proficiency interview as "a face-to-face spoken interaction usually between two participants", one of whom is an expert (usually a native or near-native speaker) or learner of the language as a second or foreign language. The purpose of the LPI is for the proficient speaker (the interviewer) to assess the non-native speaker's ability to speak the language in which the interview is carried out. For the test, the participants meet at a scheduled time, at a prearranged location such as a classroom or school office, and for a limited time period. In the scripted interviews, agendas are prepared in advance, which specify the topics for conversation and the activities to occur during the LPI. The agendas are always known to the interviewer but not

necessarily to the learner. The ultimate goal of the LPI is to obtain target information-the learner's second language oral proficiency.

The Oral Proficiency Interview

The Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) is discussed here because it is a very popular tool for evaluating second and foreign language speaking ability and the test being researched in this thesis (the EPI) is modeled based on the format of the OPI. The OPI is used in such U.S government institutions as the Foreign Language Institute and the Defense Language Institute and also being liked by nongovernmental institutions like Educational Testing Service (ETS) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) (Johnson, 2001). The OPI is based on a set of scale level descriptors developed by ACTFL, ETS and the U.S. Government's Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR). In an OPI, the test taker converses face-to-face with one or two trained interviewers on a variety of topics for ten to thirty minutes. The elicited language sample is rated on a scale ranging from zero (no functional ability) to five (proficiency equivalent to that of a well-educated native speaker). OPIs are administered usually for the following reasons: professional careers, future job assignments, pay increases and entrance to or exit from college language programs (Johnson, 2001). There have also been many attempts to generate more valid and reliable interview format direct tests since OPI birth, however, OPI is certainly most popular and commonly used speaking test until the present.

Criticism of the Oral Proficiency Interview

Along with the increased popularity of the ACTFL OPI as a means of assessing second and foreign language proficiency over years, there has been a great deal of discussion and criticism about OPI's construct validity and the processes by which it may be assessed. Bachman

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criticized that the OPI's content validity cannot be determined or properly examined because the "domain from which the content of the test is sampled is not precisely defined" (Bachman, 1990). He added that the notion of real life as a domain is too vast and too subjective. Landolf and Frawley (1985) agreed on Bachman's skepticism regarding that the OPI measures real-life proficiency. They asserted that the ACTFL *guidelines* artificially create "real world" rather than "empirically" reflect it: "The *Guidelines* model reality; they do not mirror it. If the *Guidelines* measure reality by definition, they have construed a reality and therefore are the prescriptions of a theorist deciding what speakers ought to do" (Lantolf & Frawley, 1985:342). Such researchers as Bachman, Savignon, and Lantolf and Frawley insisted on developing an *external* criterion against which the construct of the OPI should be evaluated. However, later critiques of the OPI, van Lier (1989), Johnson (1997), Johnson and Tyler (1989), and Johnson (2000) asserted the need of a thorough investigation of the OPI from *within* to determine what it is the OPI measures. They suggested that an ethnographic approach to investigating the validity of the OPI could generate valuable input for developing a new theoretical framework for speaking ability or modifying the existing models of speaking proficiency.

Another skepticism about the OPI is the issue of inter-rater reliability. Positive results about inter-rater reliability were drawn from the studies by Educational Testing Service (Liskin-Gaparro, 1983) and by Magnan (1987). Magnan (1987) found a high correlation in ratings of interviews in French and, (in the ETS study, in Spanish) assigned by apprentice testers and their expert trainers. Magnan (1987) concluded that "the ACTFL proficiency interview can be rated in a reliable fashion", but cautioned these results needed to be moderated by enlarging sample size and by considering inter-interviewer reliability and the constancy of rating standards over time (p. 536). Thompson (1995) conducted a large-scale study to investigate the inter-rater reliability of

ACTFL-certified tester in five European languages. She found patterns of discrepancy between the ratings assigned by interviewers and second raters. The interviewers, who rated the performance after conducting the face-to-face interview, tended to rate the speech performances higher than did the second raters, who assigned their ratings after listening to the interviews on audiotape. Furthermore, she disclosed that disagreements between raters across the so-called major borders (Novice, Intermediate, Advanced and Superior) were frequent. These results revealed that certain classes of candidates may be disadvantaged in the contexts hiring and promotion when the OPI is used for high-stakes decision making (Liskin-Gasparro, 2003).

Conversation vs. interview

In order to examine any LPI's features as natural conversation, an understanding of the properties of naturally occurring spoken language needs to be preceded, which is deeply related with construct validity in an LPI. Van Lier (1989) challenged the ETS's claim that the OPI measures speaking ability in the context of a conversation (Johnson, 2001). He asked a very important but simple question in the following "Is it really a conversation?" He found it difficult to accept that the OPI represents an instance of natural conversation, because the ultimate goal of the OPI is not to conduct a conversation but to elicit a ratable language sample.

It took some years to see research attempts made to investigate interview process itself beyond the results of the interviews i.e., ratings of proficiency. In regards to this, Van Lier (1989:497) stated that an undertaking that would lead us to 'identify and describe performance features that determine the quality of conversational interaction' in an oral interview (cited in Lazaraton, 1996).

It is widely known that van Lier has stimulated an interest in conducting research into the nature of discourse and the interaction that occur in the oral assessment context and studies have started to appear over years. For instance, Young and Milianovic (1992) revealed highly asymmetrical discourse arisen by variables of dominance, contingency, and goal orientation (i.e., quantity of talk, topic initiations, reactiveness and topic persistence) as well as contextual factors (interview theme and task and examiner gender). Ross and Berwick (1992) studied OPI discourse in terms of features of control (e.g., topic nomination and abandonment, reformulations) as well as features of accommodation (e.g., clarification request, display questions and simplifications), and its results indicated the OPI possesses features of both interviews and conversations.

In regards to these points, there were bodies of research to discover the nature of the OPI and whether or not it resembles conversation. Then, what is conversation? For this paper, features of conversation and interview will be mainly described focusing 'topic' based on findings in the field of discourse analysis in particular although there are various characteristics of conversation in terms of turn taking, adjacency pair, repair, and topic. A salient feature of everyday conversation is that topics are spontaneously created and negotiated. Topic is difficult to define because it includes different aspects of the communicative process, such as message, code, speaker, or interaction (Schiffrin, 1994). Van Lier (1998) also acknowledged the difficulty of an operational definition of topic (cited in Johnson, 2001). In natural conversation, topic is negotiated, and the topical coherence is being "constructed across turns by collaboration of participants" (Levinson 1983, p. 313). Brown and Yule (1983) stated that "It is a feature of a lot of conversation that 'topics' are not being fixed beforehand, but are being negotiated in the process of conversing. Throughout a conversation, the next topic of conversation is developing.

Each speaker contributes to the conversation in terms of both the existing topic framework and his personal topic" (Brown & Yule 1983, p. 89)

An interview is considered to be an important research method in the social and behavioral science (Johnson, 2001). Van Lier (1989) identified five characteristics of an interview in his work (1989, p. 497-p. 498) quoting Silverman's work. Three out of five features are shown in the following as I think those are directly related to the nature of any language proficiency interview.

1. There is some degree of asymmetry in the exchanges between interviewer and interviewee.

2. Questions are provided by one person (or a group of persons), and the talk of some other person is to be seen as answers to the questions.

3. One person is solely responsible for beginning and ending the interaction, for ending a topic and introducing a new topic, and for formulating the talk. (Silverman 1976, p.142-44, cited in van Lier 1989, p.497-98, cited in Johnson 2001, p.58)

The question whether language proficiency interview resembles natural conversation or whether it belongs to the category of interview depends closely on the extent of interaction that takes place during the test.

Studies of interaction

Levinson states that "conversation is not structural product in the same way that a sentence is – it is rather the outcome of the interaction of two or more independent, goal-oriented individuals, with often divergent interest" (Levinson, 1983, p. 294). In language proficiency interviews, interaction is a means for comprehension and knowing and judging. He and Young (1998) describes that each LPI is an "instantiation of interaction between the examiner and the language learner that is socially and institutionally organized and exhibits describable features"

(p.10). LPIs are the interactional achievements from which interview results can be extracted. Like other forms of interview, the LPI entails an interaction between two persons who influence each other and react to each other.

As for interactive practices in second applied linguistic perspective, Hall stated that "talk is comprised of interactive practices, structured moments of face-to-face interaction-differently enacted and differently valued" (1995:207-208). According to Hall, interactive practices are recurring episodes of talk that are of sociocultural significance to a community of speakers. It is widely accepted that interactive practices are co-constructed by participants, each of who contributes linguistic and pragmatic resources to the practice (He & Young, 1998).

Research about interaction in LPIs pays attention to the design of interview questions, not only as enacted scripts but also as resources that guide the examiner's and the learner's behavior and through which the examiner and the learner negotiate meanings (He & Young, 1998). Several researchers have investigated the question dimension of the Q-A adjacency pairs. For example, Lazaratan (1992) investigated the examiner's questions design and the interactively co-constructed nature of the assessment of the learner's ability. Ross (1992) and Ross and Berwick (1992) analyzed how the examiner accommodated his/her questions to the discourse behavior of the learner. They provided that linguistic accommodations are necessary to various communicative settings to occur in the OPI. As a result of the work, it is known that poor question design (i.e., problems of question relevance and meaning) can impair comprehension of questions and cause interactional problems.

Therefore, in the LPIs, shared understandings which were developed and negotiated between participants in the course of ongoing interaction make local practices to be connected

and finally constitute a talk (conversation), since LPIs necessarily entail interaction between the participants, interviewer and the candidate, during the test. Taking into consideration of the asymmetrical exchanges in testing context, interviewer has more impact on the process of constituting an interview than the candidate and thus, this affects scorings of the performance.

Interlocutor effects in language proficiency interviews

Interlocutor related factor or interviewer-related factor includes personality, gender, and quality of rapport formed by interlocutor, quality and quantity of interlocutor feedback or support, and an interviewer's idiosyncratic linguistic and discourse features. Interlocutor variation of a face to face oral proficiency test has been a thorny topic in relation to the issue of reliability. Research into oral language interviews to date has shown that interviewer behavior appear to vary considerably in terms of the amount of support given to candidates (Ross 1992, Ross and Berwick 1990) and the extent to which the interviewer guidelines are followed in terms of the type of discourse elicited from candidates (Lazaraton 1993). Brown (2003) also introduced a body of research regarding interviewer variation and revealed that interviewers have been found to vary in aspects of behaviour as diverse as: the level of rapport that they establish with candidates (Lazaraton, 1996a) ; their functional and topical choices (Brown & Lumley, 1997; Reed & Halleck, 1997); the ways in which they ask questions and construct prompts (Lazaraton, 1996b; Ross, 1996; Brown & Lumley, 1997); the extent to which or the ways in which they accommodate their speech to that of the candidate (Ross, 1992; Ross & Berwick, 1992; Berwick & Ross, 1996; Lazaraton, 1996b; Brown & Lumley, 1997; Morton *et al*., 1997); and the ways in which they develop and extend topics (Berwick & Ross, 1996).

In addition, not many studies are concerned specifically with variation among interviewers, however, there is some evidence that they do have distinct and individual styles

which they tend to employ across interviews (Ross, 1996; Brown & Lumley, 1997; Reed &

Halleck, 1997) and that they maintain these styles over time (Ross, 1996).

The followings are specific research about whether linguistic and discourse features and

techniques that the interlocutor adopt affect both the test taker's performance and the rater's

perception about the performance, if so, how they affect the candidate' performance and the

ratings.

Lazaraton (1996) examined how interlocutor's support affects test taker's performance on

the Cambridge Assessment of Spoken English, which was administered by a face-to-face fashion.

She conducted conversational analysis and identified eight different kinds of interlocutor

supports including supplying vocabulary, rephrasing questions, evaluating responses, echoing

and correcting responses, using interview prompts that require only confirmation and drawing

conclusions for candidates. These interlocutor supports might bring more authentic interaction to

the test, however, they also do bring negative functions in a couple of manners. For instance, an

interlocutor's tendency to deliver questions (prompts) as statements or drawing conclusions

could deprive the opportunity for the candidates to fully demonstrate their oral proficiency.

Moreover, providing evaluative feedback or correcting their responses could have the candidates

feel that they are not doing well on the test. Brown (2003) also investigated about interviewer

variation and its impact on rating and found that interlocutor variables affect test-takers'

performance, raters' perception on candidate ability, and test scores. She studied interviewer

difficulty based on the differences of linguistic and discourse features of the two interviewers.

Two interviewers were collected who stand at the extremes of difficulty continuum interviewed

the same candidate. The interviewers differed in regards to the ways they structured sequence of

topical talk, their questioning technique, and the type of feedback they provided (Brown, 2003, P.

1). Her study revealed that the 'easiest' interviewer was more structured in eliciting responses often reformulating failed questions. She adopted more explicit questioning techniques, regularly provided feedback and built strong rapport with the candidate. On the other hand, the most difficult interviewer was not structured in introducing and maintaining the topic. He was not skillful in reformulating failed prompts and in using systematic use of open and closed questions to elicit responses. In addition, he established weak rapport with the candidate providing little explicit statement of interest.

Brown (2003) claimed that establishing inter-interlocutor consistency is fundamental to ensure test fairness and emphasized interviewer training. Lazaraton (1996) also asserted that interlocutor factors should be considered in constructing rating scales and interviewer variables are required to be integrated in training materials based on empirical findings.

As was described above, there has been substantial research conducted about interviewer variation in terms of the discourse they produce, i.e., relationship between interviewer variation and candidate scores, or how different interviewers interviewing the same candidate vary in the amount of accommodation they make and how it affects to the score awarded. Research into the discourse produced in oral interviews and the effects of individual interviewers on candidate performance can inform interviewer training and contribute to fairness for candidates.

Topic management

Topic management refers to preferences for certain topics over others and includes decisions as to who has the right to introduce a given topic, how long a topic persists in discourse, and who has the right to change the topic (He & Young, 2001). The management of topics differs in different interactive practices. For example, Crow (1983) studied a comparison of

conversations between couples in intimate relationships and conversations in language proficiency interviews. Crow found that the couples in his study shifted the conversational topic on every 48 seconds on average. Young (1995a) found that topic shifts were far less frequent in certain language proficiency interviews. Participants shifted topics on average every 67 seconds in intermediate-level interviews and in advanced-level interviews they shifted every 84 seconds.

Research shows that topic management in the OPI is strongly controlled by interviewer. Young and Milanovic (1992) demonstrated interviewer-candidate differences in topic ratification, topic persistence, and topic initiation. Interviewers' topics were ratified twice as often as candidates' topics; interviewer-initiated topics lasted longer than those initiated by a candidate; and candidates talked more, while interviewers initiated more topics. The last finding, in particular, "candidates talked more, while interviewers initiated more topics" is consistent with the purpose of the OPI as an efficient tool to elicit speech samples from the candidates for language assessment (Ross & Kasper, 1998). OPIs share the fundamental exchange structure of interviews- 'one party asks the questions and the other party gives the answers', as Schegloff (1992) put it (cited in Ross & Kasper, 1997). The asymmetrical participation structure of interview discourse is reflected in the way topic is managed in the OPI.

Previous research on topic management in OPIs revealed that topic management activities were aggregated over participants (Ross, 1992; Ross & Berwick, 1992; Young & Milanovic, 1992; Young, 1995). In regards to this, there were also interests in the research on individual differences in interviewer topic management style. Ross and Kasper (1998) studied how topics are handled in a dissimilar way depending on interviewers and found that there was a wide range of interviewer topic management style. In their previous paper (Ross & Kasper, 1997) they disclosed that interviewer styles vary between different versions of transactional and

interpersonal styles.   They revealed that "a high involvement variety of an interpersonal style"

features various and massive exhibitions of engagement and association by the interviewer with

the candidate's contributions. Such displays include frequent selection of topics offered by the

candidate, virtual absence of inter-turn pauses, frequent latching and some overlap at turn

changes, and frequent use of emotive assessment tokens and emotive commentary (Jefferson,

1993). In addition, "stepwise transition" of topics (Jefferson, 1984) or topic shading (Schegloff,

1990) i.e., gradual transitions between topics and topic components rather than moving from one

clearly separated topic to the next, consists of the displays as well. The co-occurrence of these

features gives the OPI discourse a distinctly more conversational flavor than what might be

expected in interviews as a discourse genre (Ross & Kasper, 1998).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The topic of the present study was triggered while the author was involved with the project entitled "Development of the new oral proficiency test for ITAs (International Teaching Assistants) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign" during the Summer and Fall semesters of 2009. The background history of the development of the new oral proficiency test and the descriptions about its features are presented prior to the data.

Spec-driven language testing

The new interview oral test, the English Proficiency Interview (EPI), was developed via test specifications. The research team developed and revised test specifications (specs) that describe the content and procedures in the creation of a test and present examples of test tasks. Test specifications offer a generative guideline for the creation of test tasks and provide readers with the underlying principles behind the choices the spec authors make (Davidson & Lynch, 2002). Specification-driven test development is in particular a fit to a testing setting in which different stakeholders are involved and collaborations are needed, i.e., the EPI at UIUC, as it involves an iterative, consensus-based process.

Specs evolve, in other words, and they grow and change based on the consensus by test developers. This consensus is documented over time to address the validity as a (new) test is developed. Changes to the test are acceptable if there are evident needs for them and they are supportable (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). That leads every member involved with test development to know what has been changed and why.

The EPI specs have gone through a number of revisions. The early version of specs started to form itself based on the test format of a prototype. As the test is developed, specs evolve and are reshaped by the results of pilot testing and field trial tests. Moreover, regular discussions between specification writers, the Foreign Language Assessment Group (FLAG) and the CTE contributed to modifications as well. Nevertheless, there were sometimes issues that were not agreed upon in the process of dialogue, which is understandable in a setting in which perspectives are based on different theories and practices. On such occasions, the research team made a use of "waiting room" for the test procedures or policies that were left undecided at the time of discussion, but nevertheless needed more dialogue at a later date. Continuous conversation regarding these agendas in the waiting room provided a sound rationale for changes and modifications in the test. This process ultimately enhances the test validity and transparency, which plays a critical function in administering and using the new test. All these changes and modifications based on a consensus among the test development team and their collaborative efforts ultimately enable the new test (the specs) to become stable and clear.

Development of the new oral proficiency test

The *English Proficiency Interview (EPI)*, the new oral proficiency test for international teaching assistant at UIUC, is designed to evaluate ITA candidates' speaking ability in an academic setting. The new test was developed in collaboration with the CTE and the FLAG at UIUC. The University had been seeking a more valid and reliable tool for assessing language ability that is required in a classroom environment—specifically, for international teaching assistants. The previous version of the oral proficiency test for international teaching assistants, the SPEAK test, had been employed as a measurement tool for screening out ITA candidates for its numbers of advantages in implementation at the university for years. However, over time the

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SPEAK test was challenged by international students (test-takers) and some faculty members and administrators for the irrelevance of its tasks as they applied academic environments because it was originally designed to assess nonnative speakers' general language proficiency. The SPEAK, which use retired TSE forms (Xi, 2007) is still used for on-campus initial screening in other universities, but is being phased out with the launch of the TOEFL iBT test because its test developer, Educational Testing Service (ETS), no longer provides this test. With the reasons above, the EPI was developed and began to be administered in the Summer term of 2010 after one year of development and research with regard to its validity.

The EPI is different from the SPEAK in terms of test format, types of questions, test setting, scoring system, rating time and test security. The following (Table 1) compares the two tests, which contains, in particular, the drawbacks of the SPEAK test and the intended solution presented by the EPI.

Table 1. Comparison of the SPEAK at UIUC and the EPI

Comparison	The SPEAK test	The EPI
Test Format & Setting	Machine-mediated in a computer laboratory (approximately 20 minutes) – there is no interaction with another speaker.	Face-to-face interview in a test room (approximately 15 minutes) – the new test includes interaction.
Test Questions	Topics elicit general language proficiency Fixed questions regardless of the students' oral proficiency and field of study.	Two types of topics: General questions and field specific questions used in academic settings Different questions depending on a test-taker's oral proficiency level and field of study.
Test Scoring	20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55 and 60 (These scale steps are generic and have no particular ecological validity at UIUC.)	2, 3, 4, 4cp, 5 and 6 (These scale steps are designed with particular reference to the UIUC context.)

Table 1(conts.)

Comparison	The SPEAK test	The EPI
Delivery of Test Results	Usually takes 6 weeks to 8 weeks	Within a week after the interview
Appeals	Possible	No appeals

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The SPEAK test

The SPEAK is implemented by a computer-mediated format, which records the test-taker's language sample into an audio format.[5] Then, the raters listen to the recording and assign a score based on a scoring rubric. The scoring scale consists of nine steps ranging from 20 to 60 with an interval of 5, and a score of 50 is the cut-off score for passing the test and achieving the position of an international teaching assistant at UIUC. According to Davidson (2010)," the SPEAK descriptors provide text about expected performance at the major band levels: 20,30,40,50, and 60. Score values ending in 5 were interpolations from raters who disagree by one major band. This is also a major failing of the SPEAK". (Personal communication, 2010) The test results are reported to the departments of test-takers within 4 to 6 weeks. The SPEAK test provides 12 questions that ask test-takers questions that allow raters to assess their general speaking ability; the questions are selected from what is known as an item pool[6]. This has put the

[5] Early SPEAK tests recorded examinee speech onto cassette tapes. In recent SPEAK testing at UIUC, the recording was done onto digital networked media.

[6] The tasks presented on the SPEAK were linearly related – they existed in "forms". That is to say, the SPEAK tasks were not randomly drawn during the test, but were presented in complete collections (forms), and then test-takers might encounter a different form from one test setting to another. This made the security problem even worse, because test-takers could memorize not only particular tasks, but entire forms (Davidson, 2010, via personal communication).

test security at risk and has raised the issue of "pre-memorized" answers to the questions presented in the SPEAK test.

The English Proficiency Interview

The EPI is administered via a face-to-face interview format, which was influenced by the ACTFL OPI in its format and procedure. The notable characteristic that distinguishes the EPI from the SPEAK test is its "interactiveness", which is deeply connected to the construct validity of an interview test. A face-to-face interview format test necessarily entails interaction between the test taker and the interviewer. Although there remains an ongoing discussion regarding to what extent interaction occurs or needs to occur during interview tests and whether an LPI resembles a conversation, the EPI nevertheless retains its intrinsic nature of direct speaking test—an assertion supported from its pilot and field trial tests that demonstrated that the EPI provides a better and more valid estimate of test-takers' oral proficiency.

The EPI simulates an instructional setting in which ITAs are most likely to engage—in other words, the tasks and topics mirror the situations that ITA candidates often encounter, i.e., discussion, Q & A, and etc. The main tasks of the test are tailored for ITAs consisting of two types of questions: field-specific term definition and impromptu questions. For field-specific term definition, the interviewer asks the candidate to select one or two terms in his/her areas of study and to define the terms for the interviewer. For impromptu question, the candidate is provided with questions crafted by the interviewer based on the information the candidate says up to a certain point. Therefore, each student receives different questions depending on his/her field of study and the topic that was already discussed during the interview.

The EPI has a unique scale level called 4 CP (Conditional Pass) that allows ITA candidates to teach, on the condition that they take a specific ESL course concurrently with or before their semester of teaching.

The test does not require technology for scoring, as it is done on a face-to-face live performance. However, interviews are digitally recorded in the event that a 3rd rating is needed. For example, if the two raters do not agree on the scoring, a third rater is invited to listen to the recording and assign a final score. In addition to changes in procedures and tasks, the Appeals, which functioned as a supplementary SPEAK testing tool, is no longer used in the EPI.

The assessment procedure of the EPI includes Warm-up, Core (Interview) and Wrap-up as follows in the Figure 1. Figure 1 shows the assessment procedure of the EPI.

Figure 1. The EPI Assessment Procedure
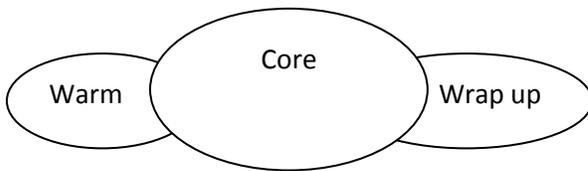
< Used by the permission of CTE at UIUC, 2010>

Format and procedure

Warm-up is the very first part of the test. The main purpose of this stage is to establish a climate of comfort between the candidate and the interviewer through brief questions and answers. In this section, the interviewer is most likely to ask the candidate to introduce him/herself and it is recommended that the interviewer avoid asking questions that require extended responses.

The Core (interview) may be considered the principal stage of the EPI, as it engages candidates in the interview by making them use their language ability for an academic context. Time for completing this section may vary depending on topics and interaction between the candidate and the interviewer. Core contains two types of tasks: field specific questions and impromptu questions. Field specific questions ask the candidate to define academic terms in his/her field of study. Impromptu questions concern topics such as a candidate's background and life in general and also cover his/her academic life. The former type of question reflects the distinct characteristics of EPI as a speaking ability test, with particular reference to an academic setting in which ITAs are most likely to engage. The terms vary depending on the study area from which the candidates come. Impromptu questions are presented via an unscripted interview in order to elicit the candidate's speaking ability in a conversational fashion. This part, in particular, features "adaptivity" in questioning. Because there may be no prearranged fixed questions provided to the interviewer, each interview takes its own shape. Even if the interview starts with the same topic, interlocutors might end up talking about very different topics or vice versa. Thus, the topics and agendas vary depending on the candidate's response during the interview.

Wrap-up is the final stage of this test procedure. The goal of this part of the test is to end the interview in a natural, comfortable manner, and does not carry any assessment efforts to probe the candidate's speaking ability in more depth.

Scoring

The EPI assesses test takers' speaking ability in terms of five features in the following: Fluency, Linguistic Accuracy, Discourse Management, Question Handling and Listening, and Listener effort.

Table 2. The EPI's Five Assessment Criteria

Assessment Criteria	Features
Fluency	smoothness in delivery and amount of hesitations and re-starts
Linguistic Accuracy	includes clear pronunciation, grammar without noticeable errors and sophisticated vocabulary
Discourse Management	the ability to develop ideas, rhetorical organization, and quantity of discourse
Question Handling and Listening	the ability to give appropriate answers, and negotiation skills for communication
Listener Effort	the ease or difficulty in processing the test taker's speech

<Retrieved on Dec 6, 10 from

http://cte.illinois.edu/testing/oral_eng/epi_overview.html#scoring>

The EPI rating descriptors were influenced by both the ACTFL OPI rating scale and the SPEAK Appeals rating scale, but they also reflected input from stakeholders very familiar with the UIUC campus and its needs (the "4cp" rating is a case-in-point of such local knowledge). With continued modifications and elaborations based on the observations in the pilot and field trial tests, the completed holistic rating includes six levels: level 2, level 3, level 4, level 4CP (Conditional Pass), level 5 and level 6. Table 2 shows the EPI scoring.

Table 3. The EPI scoring

Level	Description	Result
Level 6	Communication is always effective; speaker has sophisticated language skills appropriate for a teaching context.	Pass; student is permitted to be a TA with no restrictions
Level 5	Communication is generally effective; speaker has satisfactory language skills at ranges appropriate for a teaching context.	
Level 4CP	Communication is generally effective; however, due to isolated weakness, communication is occasionally difficult. Further ESL coursework is required during or before the first semester of teaching in order to refine the speaker's language skills for a teaching context.	Conditional Pass; student is required to successfully complete ESL 508 during or before the first semester of teaching
Level 4	Communication is somewhat effective. Inconsistent performance indicates speaker is not ready to be a classroom instructor.	Non-passing; student is NOT permitted to be a TA and must retake the exam
Level 3	Communication is marginally effective; speaker has limited language skills for a teaching context.	
Level 2	Communication is generally not effective; speaker has unsatisfactory language for a teaching context.	

<Retrieved on Oct 18, 2010 from

http://cte.illinois.edu/testing/oral_eng/epi_overview.html#scoring>

The rating scale has six different proficiency levels and major decisions are made based on the rating scale: pass, conditional pass and fail. Level 6 and 5 belong to "pass," and 4 CP indicates "conditional pass." The remainder, levels 4, 3 and 2, falls into the category of "fail." A salient feature in the test is that the rating scale features a "two-stage cut-off" score system to judge readiness for classroom English use. For those who are awarded level 4 CP, ESL coursework is required concurrently during or before the first semester of teaching to enhance their language skills in an academic context. This level may be considered the first stage of a pass. Therefore, for those who received 4CP do not need to re-take the EPI. Level 5 and 6

constitute the second stage of the two-stage pass system. For those who are rated 5 and 6 no ESL course is required during the first semester of teaching, although there are ESL elective courses available.

Data

The data for this study were collected during the first field trial administration of the new ITA oral proficiency test (the EPI) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), which was conducted in fall 2009 as part of the study entitled, "Validity study of the new oral proficiency test for ITAs at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign."

Candidates

A total of 31 candidates were recruited in the field trial in 2009 and their interviews were recorded with their consent. All the candidates were, at the time the testing took place, full-time international graduate students with varying levels of oral proficiency, plus diverse backgrounds. They ranged from 23 to 33 years in age and approximately two-thirds were male and one-third was female. The participants represented a variety of native language backgrounds. Most of the participants were Asian, coming from China, Taiwan, Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, or Vietnam. There were also students from Iran and Egypt. Of these participants, 59.4% had previously taken the SPEAK test, while 40.6% had not. For this particular study, 7 recordings were selected for qualitative analyses. This study was authorized by the IRB through School of Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics (SLCL) at UIUC and the consent form for participants is provided in Appendix (see Appendix). The criteria for selecting 7 recordings are as follows: Candidates in all 7 interviews were rated 5 or 6 on the EPI scale, which indicates that the test-takers passed the test. I limited my study to this bracket of proficiency because I do not

want test takers' level of language proficiency affects the way of topic development. In other word, this study does not purpose to look difference of topic development depending on test taker's speaking ability.

Interviewers (raters)

The new oral proficiency test requires two raters at the testing site. Both of them function the same as assessors but do dissimilar work depending their particular role on a testing date. The Interviewer (or active rater) leads the interview and elicits a ratable speech sample from a test-taker for the entire session, and then assigns a score. The rater (or silent rater) primarily listens to an interview and does not participate in the interview unless asked, and then assigns a score at the end of session. For this field trial test, a total of three interviewers participated in the entire project, two per interview; all were experienced ESL teaching professionals in the community and held MATESL degrees (Master's in Teaching English as a Second Language). One of them had received official ACTFL OPI training through workshops and had already led interviews as an interviewer in the first several sessions for demonstration and rater training. The other two interviewers were new, and they were paired with the experienced interviewer as a silent rater for the first several sessions. For this specific study, only the experienced rater was considered and selected because she had been working as a master rater and was in charge of rater training.

Data transcription and procedure

For this particular discourse analysis, 7 interview recordings—levels of 5 and 6 ('pass')—were used. All 7 recordings were numbered according to the dates and order in which they were recorded. For example, 4A indicates that the interview was recorded on the fourth day

of the field trial, and the letter "A" indicates the first participant for that day. All 7 recordings, each lasting from 15 to 20 minutes, were transcribed according to transcription conventions taken from Schiffrin (1994, p. 431-32), and excerpts were quoted whenever necessary. The interviewees remained anonymous.

As a method of analyzing discourse, I first searched for questions posed in the data.   This is because the interviewer's questions were the primary vehicle by which topics were managed. Once I found each question in the language samples, I then searched for or traced back through the recorded conversation to see how a topic evolved and how it was developed for higher, probing questions. Attempts were made to find the point (moment) where at which the interviewer was able to capture and seize upon a topic for additional questions.

In the interview samples derived for this research, I observed two ways of initiating topics and developing questions; (1) initiating a topic from the interviewee's field of study and elaborating on it to develop further questions, and (2) initiating a topic from the interviewee's interest and life in general and proceeding to develop further questions. The description about the interview samples in this paper is based on my observations and interpretations. In the following chapter, I will illustrate these patterns of topic treatment.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This section of the paper describes findings of discourse analysis regarding how a topic is initiated and is turned into questions for further probing of ITA candidate's speaking ability. In particular, the focus of this study is to observe how a topic is generated and is developed and expanded for additional questions which require the candidates to generate an extended discourse. This decision-making process will be illustrated with excerpts taken from actual interviews. Interviewer's questions are highlighted in excerpts.

Topic initiated from the candidate's major and field of study (9A, 1A, 5c, 6B)

This pattern represents how a topic is initiated from an interviewee's study area and is developed for additional probing questions using such information.

Case 1: Tape 9A

Excerpt 1)

01. Inter: <u>I see you are from computer science, is that right?</u>

02. Cand: Yes.

03. Inter: How long have you been in computer science? How far are you?

04. Cand: This is, this is my…I came here in 2004.

The interviewer begins the interview by confirming the candidate's major, which in this case is computer science. This confirmation statement, "*I see you are from computer science, is that right?*" (01) demonstrates that the interviewer is informed of the candidate's study area prior to

the interview. This is known as the "Warm up stage," in which topics mostly concern the interviewee's general background information. After several rounds of questions and answers, the interviewer goes on to seek more information about the candidate's study area, computer science, in the following.

Excerpt 2)

05. Inter: You said that you have been here since 2004? Computer science is very broad. <u>What is your area of an interest?</u>

06. Cand: Mainly, I would, so computer science ….(inaudible) is a system and networking.

07. Inter: Uh-hmm.

08. Cand: And then another … (Inaudible) is wireless.

09. Inter: Another what?

10. Cand: Another ….(inaudible) of that. It is like ….(inaudible) of tree.

11. Inter: Okay.

12. Cand: In research area. It is like computer science and system of networking and then wireless.

13. Inter: Wireless networking. Okay?

14. Cand: Yes, wireless networkings. And then the closest one and the most narrow one is quality of service for the wireless networks. That is like my…

15. Inter: That is your specialty. Wow, that sounds really fascinating. And it is a growing field.

Once the interviewer learns about the interviewee's area of study in the previous excerpt, she tries to ask more about the interviewee's specific study area. She finds that his interest area is 'wireless networking' (13) and says, "*Wow, that sounds really fascinating. And it is a growing field*" (15). Specifically the statement, "*And it is a growing field*" could indicate that the interviewer may or may not be familiar with the field of wireless networking. It is observed that

the interviewee's field of study, wireless networking, is functioning as a foreground as the interview develops. In the following excerpt, the interviewer formulates a question about the issue arised from the development of wireless networking (18).

Excerpt 3)

18. Inter: hm-hm. That is very interesting. OK. I tell you what: Let's go on to something else rather than another definition because I have a couple more questions. They really interest me because of the area you said you were in— wireless area. I just saw an ad last, uh, it was show part of 6 to 8 minutes or something, where they were talking about, um, the apps for I-phone and how they've grown and how you know. This, t his is really becoming the industry of future designing—all these fun things on the computer. Most of, a lot of apps are games and fun things like that. <u>Do you find that people are spending too much time playing with their computer toys and…?</u>

19. Cand.: Well, I think I-phone is, I mean, it's a phone, but it's more than that. It could be a player, game, and game console—something like that. And for computer nerd like me, I, if I like to play with it, because I can program in it, and sometime…

20. Inter: You can program an i-phone?

21. Cand: Yeah.

22. Inter: Wow, I didn't know that.

23. Cand: Yeah, it basically.

24. Inter: It is a computer?

25. Cand: Yeah, it is a computer and you can connect to normal pc and then we can upload whatever the script or the system that will place in i-phone. And actually if we have a good idea on an application, we can earn a lot of money.

26. Inter: I know, that's what they were saying.

27. Cand: I don't know if you had heard of the case one of the Stanford professor. He programmed a flute on i-Phone.

28. Inter: No, I haven't.

29. Cand: He earns, like, close to one million dollar.

30. Inter: Really?

31. Cand: Because each dollar on I-phone star will be one dollar. So that was around one million dollar.

32. Inter: Wow, he got a percentage of everyone. So is that how it works?

33. Cand: Right. And then because the application is so good, like you can really play flute on i-phone, so people…, I mean, paying one dollar for such an application is like, uh, it's pretty cheap (interviewer says the same). But imagine that we have one million users and that will be huge amount of money.

In the preceding discourse (excerpt 2), the interviewee says wireless networking is his research area. The interviewer, in this excerpt (excerpt 3), connects that statement to applications of I-phone and asks for an opinion about problems caused by games and computer toys (18). In turn 19, the interviewee expresses his opinion about the question and explains why computer nerds like him spend much time with i-phones. At that moment, the interviewer interrupts the interviewee's speech (20) and expresses her interest about I-phone programming and continues to talk about it (20-33). From turn 20 to 33, the topic of I-phone programming and making money using such skill is discussed with an instance of faculty member from Stanford University. At this point, the quantity of his answer has become larger than what was presented in the early excerpt because I-phone is a familiar topic to him .

Excerpt 4)

36. Inter: That's really interesting. I know when my children come down to see me, my grandchildren get bored in the car; they give them their i-phones and these little kids… I mean, five-years-old, playing games and put apps on there appropriate for children. But I see so many children, minutes in the car is okay—I think it is fine. But I see so many children growing up doing nothing but sitting in front of television and sitting in front of computer playing games and <u>I feel like, is that a really good idea for children to grow up and not interact with others but just sit in front of computer all day? Do you think that is a problem?</u>

37. Cand: Ah. I think that, yeah, I mean…, in general doing something too much would not be good balance—this case is obviously not good thing for children to grow up in that way. And that's the general problem— what is happening now for computer because we have, i-phone

have games and we have social networks all alike. Those kinds of thing would be more attractive to children more than things like hanging out with friends. I think that is the problem. It is not good for, um, especially for social interaction.

This excerpt is a continuation of the talk regarding I-phone programming and applications in excerpt 3. The interviewer, again, poses the question that asks the candidate's opinion regarding the issue of children's overspending time in front of computer in turn 36. This time, she makes the question more specific by associating her grandchildren with I-phone, and extends the discussion of this topic to the phenomenon of children's inactivity or children's sitting in front of the computer or television. This question might be seen a similar question with the one posed in turn 18 of Excerpt 2 but, is more extended and elaborated version of it. In response to this question, the interviewee states that growing up in extremely one way is not beneficial for children- spending so much time for computer- and, also points out a very important issue of children's computer overuse beyond such aspect. The candidate raises the concern of children's social networks via computer rather than having interaction with friends in reality.

In the following excerpt, the interviewer poses a more probing question that requires the candidate to produce a solution for a hypothetical situation. The purpose of the questions is to find the candidate's highest level of language use because this question asks not only the opinions of the candidate about the issue but also request his/her own solutions for it as well.

Excerpt 5)

40. Inter: Yeah, I think. Probably, I see what teenagers, I mean, I guess the social interaction with your Facebook and your other things, but even that. <u>How do you think we can start to solve that problem? How can we make it so that people today have better balance? Do you have any suggestions?</u>

41. Cand: This is tough.

42. Inter: That's a tough question. I know a lot of people are thinking about that.

43. Cand: I've been thinking about that. But I am not sure…, I mean, for very little kids, we can enforce it, but for teenager is pretty hard because they usually want to do things that they really want to do. Um, I think maybe at the very early stage, parents…, I mean, it has to be many different parts is to participating to solve that problem. Parents, children themselves, and the society and those that actually develop the program.

44. Inter: That's a good point. Those that develop the programs.

Excerpt 5 occurs nearly at the end of the interview7. In turn 40, the interviewer pushes the candidate a little bit further by asking the following questions, "*How do you think we can start to solve that problem? How can we make it so that people today have better balance? Do you have any suggestions?*", These questions are the most difficult and the highest level of questions because the interviewer asks the candidate for solutions or suggestions as well as his/her opinion on the issue that was discussed in the previous excerpt. In other words, these questions require the interviewee to put him/herself in a hypothetical situation and create solutions associated with it. In response to the question regarding how children's lack of interaction with others could be solved, the interviewee provides a comprehensive answer in the following. He asserts the importance of multilateral efforts in order to solve the issue: parents, children themselves and society, and emphasized the accountability of those that develop the computer program. The statements in turn 42, "*That's a tough question. I know a lot of people thinking about that.*" indicates that the question posed is not necessarily specific to a particular group of people, but rather, to a general topic. In addition, it also connotes that although the issue has been debated

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7 I exclude the "Wrap-up" of the EPI for consideration in this study because the "Wrap-up" is mainly for the purpose of ending an interview in a natural conversational manner.

many times, however, it is not easy to solve. Turn 44, which is the last part of interview, the interviewer agrees to the idea suggested by the candidate and ends the interview.

Case 2: Tape 1A

Excerpt 1)

01. Inter: <u>So you liked physical activities, too?</u>

02. Cand: Well, no, no—I mean the soccer game…I mean the computer-based.

03. Inter: Oh, you liked…okay, you liked to do computer games.

04. Cand: Yeah, making something work on the computer, and if that is what I created.

05. Inter: Uh, huh.

06. Cand: I excited.

07. Inter: Ah, so you liked computers ever since you were a little boy.

08. Cand: Yeah…, not little boy—I mean, 'undergrad student.'

09. Inter: An undergrad.

10. Cand: Actually, yeah. When I was a little boy I also liked computers.

Before Excerpt 1, taken from the early part of the same session, it is not clear what was asked of the interviewee. It could not be verified because the very early part failed to be recorded in the tape 1A. It is assumed, given the candidate's response in turn 2 and 4, that the interviewer might have asked what the candidate did for fun or leisure. In regard to this question, the interviewee says that he likes to work on things on a computer, i.e., playing a soccer game on computer (04). Based on turn (04), the interviewer makes the inference of, '*Ah, so you liked computers ever since you were a little boy*' (07). This statement appears to be a simple statement, but it can also be interpreted as a question for information. It is not clear whether the interviewer comes to the

conclusion or just assumes that the interviewee's enjoyed computers ever since he was a little boy. But it becomes clearer why she made such statement as we go through the excerpts below. She had some questions in mind related to computer use and its use among little kids. Thus, it may be inferred that the topic of 'computer and its young users' is the main source of questions throughout the entire interview.

Excerpt 2)

11. Inter: Well, let me…let me ask you. Because you are in computer science and because you probably started at a young age playing with computer games and you talk about, you know, even as you got older developing and stuff—and you have children, right? You said you have two children: <u>Can I ask you how old they are?</u>

12. Cand: Uh, uh…three year and, uh…five months.

13. Inter: Oh, they're still babies. Okay, so…they probably aren't into computers yet.

14. Cand: Uh, not.

In turn 11, the interviewer briefly recapitulates what's been discussed in the preceding excerpt and tries to learn how old the interviewee's kids are. Line 13 exhibits why she poses the following question, '*Can I ask you how old they are?'* because she already knows that the interviewee has kids and appears to elicit more information about them to talk about computer use and his kids. Up to this moment, it is not quite clear what would be the scope of the topic for additional questions. However, it could be speculated that from turn 13: '*Okay, so they probably aren't into computers yet,'* that the interviewer intends to pose questions about computer and its young users. In addition, in turn 13, '*Okay, so they probably aren't into computers yet,'* the inference is drawn based on the candidate's response in turn 12: ' *Uh. Uh…three year and,*

uh…five months.' In the following excerpts 3 and 4, a series of questions that asks the

candidate's opinion regarding computer use among young kids emerge.

Excerpt 3)

20. Inter: Well, what do you think what I see happening is because I have grandchildren that are probably the same age as your children. I see that children now are spending more and more time at a computer.

21. Cand: Yeah, that's right.

22. Inter: Playing computer games, I don't see them out playing soccer and baseball.

23. Cand: Yeah, that's right.

24. Inter: And riding bikes as much as they used to. What do you think the effect of this is gonna be on our youth today, and I'm sure that happens in your country as well as ours.

((phone rings))

25. Cand: Sorry.

26. Inter: That's okay.

27. Inter: So, what do you think the effect of that this technology and this, this love of just sitting and playing is going to have on youth?

28. Cand: So, okay, not, uh..., I mean, it's not about youth problem, only I mean it also problem for the, uh, adult people. I mean, these days everybody is doing more and more thing in the cyberspace…uh…, but before, I mean, before there is the Internet before just meet each other and talk together—discuss something—but now they communicate with the, uh, email and Facebook and, uh, instant messenger, and that, I mean, changing, uh, the behavior of the adult— also, especially youth—is, I mean…you know…yeah, I mean, of course they that, uh, they will grown up as a people that, I mean, communication is basically something, uh, happening in the cyberspace. I think so, so that change a lot the way that human live, uh, in the future, and of course, I mean, we are effecting—affected—by that changing wave of the, uh, I mean, doing cyberspace.

Turn 20 begins with questioning format "What do you think?" but, it actually describes her observation about the phenomenon-youth's excessive time spending in front of a computer. In other words, turn 20 is more of an explanation of why the interviewer poses the question rather than it functions as an actual question prompt. In addition, the interviewer provides a personal revelation: '*Because I have grandchildren that are probably the same age as your children.'* (20) This statement elicits, in turns 21 and 22, the interviewee's strong agreement about the issue, which could possibly forge a bond on the issue between the two parties. The interviewer continues to talk about her observation about the issue till the early part of turn 24. Then, the interviewer poses the question for opinions regarding the effect of rampant spread of the phenomenon worldwide in turn 24. But the conversation was interrupted immediately after the question because the interviewee's cell phone rang. This unexpected incident triggers a rephrasing of the previous question (24) by the interviewer in turn 27. That is to say, turn 27 is a reformulated rendering of the question asked in turn 24. In response to the question in turn 27, the interviewee finally discusses the effect of cyberspace communication on people in the future.

Excerpt 4)

29. Inter: Have you seen the movie 'Wall e?'

30. Cand: Oh, "wall e."

31. Inter: Wall e

32. Cand: Yeah, I seen that movie.

33. Inter: Uh huh…, where all the people, you know, they can't get out of their chairs.

34. Cand: Yeah.

35. Inter: So <u>how does this impact people if they don't go out and play soccer, if they don't go and ride their bikes and run and play tag with other kids? Do you think that that people are going to become more and more obese? Do you think this is going to be a health risk?</u>

36. Cand: Yeah, it may be.

37. Inter: For the next generation.

38. Cand: But, but, but… even in that case, you know, the uh, medical science is always developing and uh, in terms of the, uh, average, uh, age of people that—I mean, live, I mean how many years they can live it remain the same or even better than before, even though they are doing not much exercise.

In this excerpt, the interviewer poses another question regarding the issue discussed in the previous excerpt, Excerpt 3. This time, the question is more focused on how the issue would affect people in terms of health (35). To accomplish this, the interviewer brings up the movie '*wall e*,' which describes all the people who cannot get out of their chairs and connects that idea to the issue that they discussed in the preceding conversation. For this question, the candidate is required to elaborate on the impact of technology on people in terms of health risk.

Excerpt 5)

40. Cand: It's not a health, I mean, physical problem, I think, but the more problem is the uh, way that people communicate and the way our society is constructed is quite—will be quite different from now because of that.

41. Inter: Mm hmm…<u>so how would you—how do you convince people that they need to communicate in a face-to-face environment or they need to….</u>

42. Cand: No, no, no.

43. Inter: <u>Write letters instead of use email and Facebook. Is that--that's not what you mean?</u>

44. Cand: I don't think it's gonna happen and I don't have any intention to encourage people do that, uh, well, face-to-face meeting is a little bit I can recommend, but still, the reason that the doing, uh, email or Facebook is so popular is that it is convenient.

Turn 40 is the candidate's opinion in response to the question in the prior excerpt. Based on the interviewee's response, the interviewer then proceeds to the next question in turn 41 and 43: '*So*

how would you…how do you convince people that they need to communicate in a face-to-face

environment or do they need to write letters instead of use email and Facebook?. In turn 43, the

interviewer clarifies her question and tries to elicit the candidate's response to her question.

Excerpt 6)

46. Inter: <u>So how, how soon will you allow your child—your 3-year-old—to use email?</u>

47. Cand: Oh.

48. Inter: Or Facebook?

49. Cand: Uh, as long as I can delay…I don't know, but you know…what I saw a couple of, uh, other kids' nephews…kids, and in 5—they are 5 years and 4 years and 6 years—they all do computer and playing games on computer and even connect Internet to…

50. Inter: Ahh…

51. Cand: …to games without any instruction from their parents.

52. Inter: And how old are they?

53. Cand: Five, four.

This excerpt appears at nearly the last portion of the interview. This time, the interviewer

poses another question in turn 46: '*So how…, how soon will you allow your child—your 3-year-*

old to use email?' It appears that this question is a more personalized form of question than the

one in the prior excerpt, as it deals with a probable occasion that would occur to the interviewee

in the near future. This question is truly related to the interviewee's kids and does not sound as if

it had been prepared in advance. In turn 47, 'oh', it is uncertain whether or not this is a

representation of the candidate's surprise or an exclamation in response to the question. Perhaps

this indicates that the candidate may not have expected to receive such a question or he had

never previously thought about that topic. Question 46 appears more approachable than the

question in 41in the sense that the candidate is invited to talk about an agenda directly related to

his kids. This question is drawn from the candidate's study field and is developed to an occasion that is closely related to the interviewee's child.

<center>Case 3: Tape 5C</center>

Excerpt 1)

01. Inter: Le- Le- We'll go on to another topic…um, you…you like studying language OK? You studied English and you speak English very well. <u>Do you have other languages that you speak?</u>

02. Cand: I speak a little bit of French.

03. Inter: Do you really?

04. Cand: It's interesting, I forgot all of my Japanese because I was raised by my Japanese—I mean Japanese-speaking grandparents.

In the preceding threads of conversation, the interviewer had the interviewee define two terms from her field of study. Turn 01: '*We'll go on to another topic*' shows that the interviewer wants to move to a different task—Impromptu questions. This statement functions as a landmark of moving from one task to another, in other words, from field-specific questions to impromptu questions. This explicit transition remarks between tasks makes it easier to move between topics because it confirms that they (both parties) completed one task and are moving to another. It is not a requirement for an interviewer to make a distinction between tasks by addressing a statement such as the one made in turn 1. It is found in the data that, for the most part, the interviewer leads an interview without providing transition remarks; however, that varies depending upon circumstances. In this recording, the interviewer might have felt that she needed to initiate a new topic that was different from the previous conversation that was shared with the candidate. For the purpose of transition, therefore, she uses a topic-switching remark such as,

'*We'll go on to another topic*' as in turn 1. In the EPI, the interviewer is usually informed of the candidate's major prior to the interviewee taking the test. It is speculated in the statements '*um, you…you like studying language OK? You studied English and you speak English very well*' (01). Of course, the statement "*You speak English very well*" which could possibly mean that the interviewer already made an assessment about the candidate's speaking ability with respect to the task of term definition: the candidate performed well on the term definition. After this, the interviewer initiates a topic, studying language, by asking the following question: '*Do you have other languages that you speak?*' (01). 'Learning language' is the primary source of the conversation throughout the entire series of excerpts.

Excerpt 2)

05. Inter: Really, wow, so you have a lot of languages that you do. And I think that learning languages is more common in other countries than it is in America. A lot of kids grow up not wanting to take a foreign language or not wanting to study another language. Um, <u>I think it's really important to learn other languages and I was just wondering if you could give me your opinion on, you know, is it important to learn other languages, and why is it important, and maybe should we be pushing it a little bit harder in our schools here in the United States?</u>

06. Cand: Well, there are two perspective that actually made me, um, totally agree with the idea that we should teach our, uh, kids—we should teach our next generation to…to acquire a second language or a foreign language. One perspective is that, well, if you are, um, if you are learning a—a second language or a foreign language in a very young age, I think more or less the kid will build on sort of like intuition, so take myself for example: I was raised by my Japanese-speaking grandparents and but my first tongue—my native tongue—I consider as a dialect in, in, in, China, which is called Haka. So, my grandparents raise me with Haka and Japanese. And then, when I was old enough to go to school, I started to learn Mandarin Chinese, which is consider as a standard language both in Taiwan and in China. And then after that, like when I was 9 years old, um, my peer—like the school that I was situated in—uh, my peer…they kind of forced me to pick up a little bit of Taiwanese, which is Hokanese in, in, in, China. …..

I really like one example in the, um, MATESL…in the MATESL program. In many courses, repeatedly, the teacher—the instructor—the professor—they, um, have been encouraging us to, um, take the chance of learning a second language or the foreign language, and as a teacher I think it really helps because once you become familiar with the second language or the foreign

language, definitely, you are like kind of like giving you the access to, um, the way how student—
they learn their second language or foreign language, and you can definitely have more empathy
with the process of their learning, their learning process. That's my take.

07. Inter: Yeah, very interesting. Yeah, I think it would be fun to be in your class.

In the previous excerpt, the interviewer learned that the candidate had a diverse language

learning background, and confirms this by saying, '*So you have a lot of languages that you do'*

in turn 5. The interviewer wants to hear the candidate's opinions about learning foreign

languages in terms of the following questions; Is it important to learn other languages?: Why is it

important? (05). The interviewer elaborates on the question by connecting it with foreign

language education in the United States, i.e., how it should be pushed in schools in the United

States (05). Prior to the question, the interviewer states different circumstances regarding

learning foreign languages between other countries and the United States. On the premise that

'*learning languages is more common in other countries than it is in America,'* the interviewer

brings up the issue of children's not wanting to study other languages. For this question, the

candidate provides a long response to the question, illustrating her experience as a multiple-

language speaker.

<div align="center">Case 4: Tape 6B</div>

Excerpt1)

01.Inter: <u>Well, I see here that you are in labor and employment relations</u>

02. Cand: That's true.

03. Inter: That's a name change: Didn't it used to be called 'labor and industrial relations'?

04. Cand: Yeah, that's right.

05. Inter: So when did it change?

06. Cand: Uh, it changed two—uh, two years ago.

07. Inter: Oh, I'm really behind.

The interviewer begins the session confirming the candidate's major, labor and employment relations (01). In turn 3 "*That's a name change: Didn't it used to be called 'labor and industrial relations'?*" the interviewer asks about the name of the candidate's department because she wants a confirmation that the name has been changed. This excerpt reveals that the interviewer is familiar with the University because she has been working at UIUC for a long time. This is likely to help the candidate feel comfortable in the beginning of the interview because she is able to discuss something that is familiar to her.

Excerpt 2)

10. Inter: Interesting. Well, in, in, instead of going to another definition, <u>let me expand on this one because I find this topic really interesting.</u>

11. Cand: Okay.

12. Inter: I know that there is a lot of pros and cons of unions.

13. Cand: Right.

14. Inter: And I know a lot of people that are in unions feel that they're really important and there are good things that unions do, but unions can sometimes overstep their bounds and have workers strike or dema—or have demands so high that it could hurt a company. And so I can see why many companies don't like unions—I mean, <u>I even see this sometimes on campus with the GEO.</u>[8]

15. Cand: Right.

16. Inter: As…as being a union and pushing for more and more power and the university is trying to, you know, deal with it, but sometimes the—there's problems.

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[8] The GEO refers to the Graduate Employees Organization, the union representing graduate student workers at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

17. Cand: Right.

      In the preceding lines of conversation, the interviewer had the interviewee define a term

from her field of study. The candidate chose terms from her field—*trade union and labor*

union—and provides a long description of the history from the foundation of unions, to their

roles and the aspects of how they operate in the modern era. With a description of how unions

began and the change in their roles over time makes the interviewer become fully engaged with

the conversation. Thus, the interviewer explicitly expresses that she wants to cling to this topic,

by stating the following: '*Well, in, in, instead of going to another definition, let me expand on*

this one because I find this topic really interesting' (10). In turn 13: '*I know that there is a lot of*

pros and cons of unions,' she brings up the debatable issue of unions. In addition to this

statement, she first acknowledges the benefits of unions in general and then, she points out the

problems of excessive demands from unions, which could ultimately cause harm to a company

(15). She elaborates on the issue, referring to possibly negative aspects of unions in referring to

the GEO. Since the example the interviewer provides is the organization housed within UIUC,

this might provide a better understanding of the situation to the candidate in response to the

question.

Excerpt 3)

20. Inter: <u>So what—how can we make unions better so that there won't be this friction? So that</u>
<u>unions can really be a useful tool and not overstep their bounds. Is that a possibility?</u>

21. Cand: I—there certainly is because, um, ok…so, so, so, so, so let me try to, to put that into
different aspects. The first one is the, uh, union members have very different background. So for
example, not all the members in the union need sp—uh, health bene—child care, so for example,
yeah. so I, I think a very important function of the union is, is, try to figure out—okay, um, 'what

do our members want?' and then an—and then come up with a pla—platform then that can be used c—can be used as a communication between the union and un—university.

22. Inter: mm-hmm.

23. Cand: Because personally I don't like the idea—the idea of the so-called dis—distributed bargaining—that there's a fixed sized pie, and the larger size I get the smaller—less size you get the smaller size that remain on the table.

In turn 20, the interviewer asks how unions can be used as a useful tool without

overstepping their bounds. The candidate expresses her viewpoint about the distribution of

benefits, depending on members' background with regard to a union at UIUC.

Topic initiated from the candidate's interest and life in general (5A, 6C, 1D)

This pattern represents how a topic is initiated from an interviewee's interest and life in general

and is developed to additional questions using such information.

Case 5: Tape 5A

Excerpt 1)

01. Inter: Yeah, very good. Oh. Tell me what the, I, <u>I</u>'ve been talking a lot of about computers and, and things like that. <u>Tell me what you would like to do for fun</u>. Do you do things other than? I know people when they come here to do a Ph. D, they work pretty hard, but you gotta have fun, too. <u>What do you like to do?</u>

02. Cand: Uh, for example, I like some sports—like table tennis

This excerpt shows that the interviewer initiates a new topic- how the interviewee spends

time for fun. These turn exchanges occur at the end of the term definition task and in the

preceding turns there was a lot of talk about computer terms and the general interests of the

interviewee. The interviewer's statement, "*I've been talking a lot of about computers and things

like that*" (01) also indicates that they spent a great deal of time talking about the interviewee's

major, computer science, prior to Excerpt 1. Now the interviewer wants to move to another topic

by saying "*Tell me what you would like to do for fun*" (01) and this statement shows

transitioning moment between tasks. The topic of interviewee's interest in fun activities

functions as a foreground for the following questions of the interview. The interviewer could

have posed additional questions using information discussed about the interviewee's major in

prior turns, but she did not. She might not have had a chance to capture a topic for additional

probing questions. Therefore, she might have thought she would rather try the interviewee's life

in general (01) so that she could obtain another opportunity to gather information by initiating a

new topic.

Excerpt 2)

03. Inter: Uh, hmm (laughing). That doesn't surprise me. A lot of people that do computer science tend to like video games. I bet you are good at them, too. (Laughing). Your hands are probably very…eye and hand coordination to this probably very good. What do you like better doing video games or real activities?

04. Cand: I think real activities is more interesting.

05. Inter: More interesting? Good for you. I am glad. Because I know a lot of people that would prefer to do the video games and not get out and be active all the time. So, so yeah. So you think that do you ever go to ARC and work out there?

06. Cand: Yes.

07. Inter: A-ha. Do you find other people that you can be competitive?

08. Cand: Yeap.

09. Inter: When you play table tennis at Civic center, do they have teams and things there? Do they actually have tournaments and stuff?

10. Cand: Actually, they, I think that table tennis is a recent position in civic center. So I think so far people just play.

11. Inter: Just for fun.

12. Cand: Yeah.

13. Inter: Uh-huh. Yeah, interesting. Do you ever play racqueball?

14. Cand: No, I haven't.

15. Inter: They have tried that one.

16.Cand: Haven't, haven't, much time.

17. Inter: Haven't, don't have much time.<u>When you were, when you were. Where are you from?</u>

18.Cand: I am from Columbia.

19.Inter: Columbia? Huh. I studied Spanish long time ago at this University and my instructor was from Columbia. They said that that was the pure Spanish. Is that true? (laughs)

20. Cand: (laugh)

21. Inter: I don't know. So when you were a child growing up, <u>did you and were you pretty active in your family? Did you go outside and play a lot? Or did you do a lot of TV-type stuff?</u>

22. Cand: I am not sure. I don't know. I think, I went outside very often to do some, I mean, for example, to learn some sports.

In response to the question (03), "What do you like better, doing video games or real activities?" when the interviewee answers that he likes real activities better than video games, there may be a chance for the interviewer to ask a question for opinion about physical activity. We might expect that the interviewer would move to a question for opinion about physical activity straight from turn 5 upon receiving the interviewee's preference of one over the other (04). Instead, the interviewer keeps gathering the interviewee's information up to turn 22. In turn 17, the interviewer introduces similar topic about where the interviewee is from and inquires whether he was physically active when growing up (21). The phrases, '*When you were, when you were…where are you from?*' shows that *'where are you from?'* might not be the intended question in the first place, but for some reason, she ends up moving to that question. These questions might seem abrupt in topic transition, but the following excerpt shows that why she did

ask that question. She connects the discussion to the current problem of children's inactivity. It is

possible that maybe she wants to see whether there is any discrepancy about the issue between

countries not simply making a comparison about the issue between 'now' and 'then.'

Excerpt 3)

30.Inter: Pretty average person.

31.Cand: Yeah, not all the time—not, not all the time.

32. Inter: Nice balancing in your life. I don't know, I find that there are too many children today that don't go outside and play. And they do sit in front of a TV and they do play video games, maybe because we are in an age of technology, but I worry a little bit that they are not physical enough. <u>Do you think that what's gonna happen in children growing up not physically active? Do you think that is good or bad?</u>

33. Cand: I think that's about—actually I think, for example, there are new video games that attempt to encourage people to be more active—even indoors. For example, have you ever seen the "Wii" games?

34. Inter: Actually, I have never actually played one. But I have seen apps for them. So how does that work? I see you like to do dance and stuff. They have wii for women for fitness.

35. Cand: Yeah.

The interviewer does not pose additional questions about physical inactivity in the

preceding excerpt, although it seems that there is an opportunity to do so (Excerpt 2, Turn 5).

Instead, the interviewer does that in turn 32. It might be that the interviewer would rather

discuss the issue specifically about children's physical inactivity presently rather than its

tendency in general. In the following excerpt, the interviewer extends the question further by

comparing Columbia and the U.S.

Excerpt 4)

40. Cand: I think anyway, people need to interact between each other. And I think it is important to do some outside activities like sports. So I think that I don't know.

41. Inter: <u>Is that the same in Columbia? Is that the same problem? Do you see children are less active? Or is that pretty much us problem? I mean, I know it is a problem here; I have seen it.</u>

42. Cand: I think Columbia, for example, somehow we are forced to do a lot of sports during the school time. So, I think people….

43. Inter: People get more active.

44. Cand: Yeah.

45. Inter: Interesting.

46. Cand: I think here maybe it is not us…there is no compulsory education, physical education, I mean, to encourage people to do exercises, to do to practice—some sports—during the school.

47. Inter: You know why—because schools have less and less funding all the time, so they drop things that aren't what they consider the most important—math, reading, and science—so they drop the art, they drop the music, they drop the physical activities. It is really a sad thing. You know, I think they should be part of school for everybody. Yeah, interesting. <u>So what do you like best about the United States?</u>

48. Cand: I think many things are a kind of similar. Because, I mean, in South America, many things are, I think there is a great influence of researching in the structure of the society in South America, especially in Columbia, I think it is very difficult to say what is...um….

The interviewer initiated physical inactivity as a new topic in Excerpt 2 and extends it to the issue about U.S. education (41). This may be because she is well aware of the issue herself and wants to learn about differences among countries. However, this does not indicate that the interviewer only wants to talk about the issue related to the U.S. As Excerpt 2 illustrates, the interviewer is not only interested in the issue in general but also the specific situation of the country the candidate comes from. The interviewer states that the issue might come from different education system between Columbia and the US. In response for this answer, the

interviewer points out one of the problems of US education system i.e., dropping arts, music and physical activities because of lack of funding. At the end of the interview, she asks what the interviewee likes about US in general and ends the interview.

<div align="center">Case 6: Tape 6C</div>

Excerpt 1)

01. Inter: No, huh…very interesting…very interesting. <u>Well what kind of things do you like to do just for fun?</u>

02. Cand: Uh, I watch a lot of TV.

03. Inter: Mmm-hmm.

04. Cand: But these days I just couldn't have, um, free time.

05. Inter: Don't have much free time because you…

06. Cand: Yeah. my exam is next week and…

07. Inter: Oh, boy!

08. Cand: Just couldn't…

09. Inter: And you're giving us all this wonderful time! Wow!

10. Cand: But yeah, I spend a lot of time watching TV.

Excerpt 1 takes place immediately after the topic about the wedding ceremony in the candidate's country. The topic was drawn from the fact that the candidate was a newly married. The interviewer and the candidate discussed how the features of a wedding ceremony were different from those in the U.S. In turn 1, the first part, '*No, huh, very interesting, very interesting'* shows the interviewer's response to the wedding custom of the candidate's country and it functions as an ending statement for the topic as well. Now she asks, '*What kind of things do you like to do just for fun?'* which indicates that a new topic is being initiated. The

interviewer switches quite abruptly from the topic of wedding customs of the country the interviewee comes from to pastimes (01). In regard to the question (01), the interviewer learns that the candidate loves watching TV in her free time. In turn 6, the candidate says that she does not watch TV lately because she has an exam coming up that week. In response to this, the interviewer expresses her surprise by exclaiming, '*Oh, boy!' (07)*, and continues with the following statement: '*And you're giving us all this wonderful time—wow!* (09). Turn 9 shows that the interviewer is conducting the interview for the purpose of field trials. Moreover, this could be one way that the interviewer expresses her gratitude to the candidate for sparing her time for the field trial test. Remarks such as the one in Turn 9 present a unique occasion that occurred in this specific field trial test in the context of improvisation of topics because the EPI, an unscripted interview test, allows a wide range of topics under the interviewers' discretion.

Excerpt 2)

12. Cand: I have some couple—a couple of favorite shows.

13. Inter: Uh, huh. <u>What kind of shows are your favorites?</u>

14. Cand: "Desperate Housewives."

15. Inter: Really? My daughter loves those! I never watched it, so I don't know.

In continuation of the topic addressed in Excerpt 1, the candidate's enjoyment in watching TV for pastime, the interviewer goes into more detail for information in turn 13. She leads the interview to a specific TV show for elaboration of the topic and learns the candidate's favorite show, "Desperate Housewives."

Excerpt 3)

21. Inter: Very interesting. Well, you know, I think that, um, I think watching TV is a really a good pastime and I think that especially when you're in a different culture and you know you have that language component it—it really helps, but I worry a little bit about our youth because I think young people watch too much TV.

22. Cand: Ah, huh.

23. Inter: And I would like to see our youth out playing more or even reading books, rather than just mindless stuff so what—<u>what do you think that as parents or as a society we can do, um, to get children more active and not spend as much time watching TV, or maybe you think that's not a bad thing—I don't know wha—what's, what's your opinion on that?</u>

Up to turn 21, the interviewer and the candidate have talked about a TV show that the candidate liked to watch for a pastime. In this excerpt, the interviewer transits the topic from a simple factual question to more opinionated one. Prior to asking the candidate's opinion regarding TV's effects on youth, the interviewer acknowledges the benefits of watching TV, in particular, on the part of international students, for its language components (21). Then, she raises her concern in regard to TV watching as a social issue. In turn 23, she considers watching TV as mindless stuff, which obviously shows her viewpoint about this issue. However, she does not say that watching TV is necessarily a bad thing as she opens the possibility of different views on it in the following statement: '*Maybe you think that's not a bad thing—I don't know wha—what's, what's your opinion on that?* (23). This type of remark may put the candidate in a comfort zone which facilitates her in exercising her language ability to the fullest because it may provide the candidate with the impression that she would not be judged based on her opinion.

Excerpt 4)

24. Cand: Uh, it's not a good thing…I wouldn't, I wouldn't disagree because the interesting news that I recently read is that, uh, really young kids—uh infants under, under 3 years old—if they watch TV too much they have—they are less likely to develop their language skills.

25. Inter: Really? Okay…mm-hmm.

26. Cand: That's, that's exactly opposite wha—to what I thought because I thought if the childrens are watching TV a lot b—and because that basically—that's basically, uh, input of sounds and they can hear what people are talking, so I thought it's a, um, beneficial experience to them to just for them to, uh, learn language. But it's not, it in, um, the research findings, so I don't not—I don't think it's a good thing for, uh, young kids, uh, spend a lot of time sitting in front of TV and watching it because that experience makes, makes them you know a—as you said—uh, not active at all.

27. Inter: Right. Mm-hmm…more passive.

28. Cand: They are not thinking; they are just recei—receiving the information from that box—not uh, rather than they think.

29. Inter: Not interacting.

30. Cand: Yeah, interacting.

In response to the question raised in the previous excerpt, the candidate does not disagree to the bad effects of TV on kids (24). In addition, she provides a rationale for her opinion based on the recent news which revealed a result contradictory with the one that she has been familiar till recent times (24). For this new information, the interviewer shows her moment of surprise by exclaiming, '*Really?*' (25), which discloses that she never knew the fact before, either. In turn 26, the candidate specifies the reasons why kids are less likely to develop language ability if they are exposed to TV for a considerable amount of time. Based on what she learned from research findings regarding children's language ability, she draws a conclusion that too much TV watching causes children inactive. Along this line of conversation, in turn 29 the interviewer paraphrases what the candidate says in the previous turn into the following words: '*Not interacting.*' Interestingly, the candidate picks up solely the word 'interacting,'—not the whole phrase, 'Not interacting,' although she needs to state the whole phrase for precise meaning. It is likely that the candidate only receives the phrase focusing on the usage of 'interacting'—not really attending to the context.

Case 7: Tape 1D

Excerpt 1)

01. Inter: So, tell me: Have you been back home since—do you go back home very often? I mean, that's a long ways to go, isn't it?

02. Cand: Yeah, um, when I was in my undergraduate, I didn't go back home for four years.

03. Inter: Wow!

04. Cand: So, my mother and my sister eventually come here and visit us during our graduation.

After the term definition task, the interviewer initiates a new topic, asking how frequently the candidate visits his country. Turn 1, '*So, tell me,*' functions as a topic transition from one task (term definition) to another (impromptu question). The interviewer learns that the candidate had a gap of four years since he last visited his home country since he had begun studying in the States. The question in turn 1, '*Have you been back home since—do you go back home very often?*' is a question that seeks information. But the following remark, '*I mean, that's a long ways to go, isn't it?*' in the same turn (01) reveals her assumption that the candidate may not be able to visit his country often because of its long distance from the U.S. Up to this moment, it is unclear what would be the main topic for further questions because it is the very beginning of talk of the new topic.

Excerpt 2)

07. Cand: Mmm…we all—yeah…for four years we haven't been back home, but after graduation we just go back for two months—and three months for him, and then…yeah, so…

08. Inter: So, at how—how many hours on the plane is that?

09. Cand: That was pretty long. I guess it's close to one day.

10. Inter: A whole day of on the plane.

This excerpt is continuation of the topic that had been dealt with in the prior part of the conversation. In turn 08, the interviewer poses a question regarding the time of flight to the candidate's country. She learns that the candidate should stay almost a whole day on the plane, which might be a fairly long and tedious trip. Additional questions related to traveling on a plane follow in the excerpts below.

Excerpt 3)

12. Inter: Well, I'll tell you—you know, there has been basically, because of a lot of the terror problems—there have been a lot of safety features added to airports now that at times can be very frustrating and time-consuming, and you have to be at an airport really early to, you know, and go through all that and a lot of people, um, well, for one thing, <u>do you think those do you think that has helped? Having those safety features—do you think that they work?</u>

13. Cand: I guess so, 'cause we haven't had a lot of major...

14. Inter: We haven't had any problems, yeah. I thought, a lot of people have said, ya know, 'This is just way too much of a hassle. Flying is no fun anymore, and I think you're going overboard' and being, you know, um, just being panicked about, about stuff like that. <u>What do you think would happen if we took away some of those rules, those safety features? So you think it's good or bad?</u>

15. Cand: Personally, I..., I..., I didn't feel the inconvenience, uh, with all those checks. I guess it's only 15 minutes out of my whole travel, which is 24 hours or something. I think it's, it's a small price to pay. Um, I...I don't really see, per—I personally don't see how it would adversely affect the safety if we take away all those rules—um, but I think it would, um, it would, it would encourage people to sort of, um you know, try something that is bad.

In turn 12, the interviewer associates the topic—the candidate visiting his country—with the issue related to terrorist attacks, and centering on safety features added to airports. She

continues to describe unpleasant and frustrating situations at airports because of these safety rules, i.e., time consuming, etc. Then, she asks whether or not the interviewee believes whether those rules work. In regard to this question, the candidate gives a positive response to having safety rules. In turn 14, the interviewer talks about dissatisfaction arising among the public regarding safety rules and poses a question about a hypothetical situation in which the safety rules would be removed. For this question, the candidate does not agree with those who complain about all the procedures that they need to go through for safety checks. He claims that sacrificing a small portion of time is necessary for the overall safety of flights.

All these series of questions are directly related to the candidate's life, considering that he is an international student who, most of time, travels via plane to visit his country. In particular, the fact that it takes approximately an entire day to the candidate's home country makes the topic more authentic because it is likely that the candidate may face this situation in reality.

Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

The present study makes an attempt to describe how the interviewer initiates a topic and adaptively crafts additional questions based on interviewees' responses in order to check language ability and to probe at higher levels. Discourse analysis, which features a narrative and qualitative approach, was used as a research method for data analysis. The findings in this analysis will be discussed in terms of topic initiation and the process of topic development. Aspects of conversations and interviews in the context of the EPI will be handled as well.

How a topic is initiated and developed into additional questions

With respect to how a topic is initiated, analysis of the data reveals that there are two patterns that the interviewer follows in initiating a topic: a) initiating a topic from the candidate's major and field of study, b) initiating a topic from the candidate's interest and life in general. Prior to discussing specific categories of initiating topics, it should be noted that these categories are strictly limited to samples from a field trial that took place in 2009. Moreover, only a tentative conclusion can be drawn considering a rather small sample size—7 recordings. The first pattern is found in the recordings, 9A, 1A, 5c and 6B. A brief description of topic initiation and development for each interview is in the following. Interview 9A begins with the question about the test taker's major, computer science. The candidate states that wireless networking is his specific study area. The interviewer connects the field of wireless networking to applications of I-phones and asks about the issue of a current phenomenon—people spending too much time in front of a computer. Lastly, she extends the topic to solutions for the issue, asking for suggestions from the test taker. Interview 1A begins with the test taker's study area, computer

science. The interviewer draws out the fact that the test taker liked playing with computer games at a young age; she extends the discussion of such information to computer use among young children. Then, the interviewer asks about the effect of computer use among youth and raises the health issue caused by lack of physical activity. The test taker responds that the way people have communicated in the past and how our society is presently constructed would be different. The topic moves to that of how the test taker would convince people that they need to communicate in a face-to-face manner instead of by email or Facebook. Lastly, the interview ends with the question that is directly related to the interviewee's family, namely, when the interviewee would let his child use a computer. Interview 5C starts with the test taker's language learning experience as a multiple language speaker because the candidate is from the department of linguistics. The interviewer wants to know why learning foreign languages is important and whether or not schools in the U.S. need to push it. The test taker agrees on the idea of teaching foreign languages at a young age because she thinks, based on her experience, it builds intuition for other languages and thus, it provides students with undeniable benefits in learning other languages. Interview 6B starts with a name change of the candidate's department—labor and employment relations. The interviewer brings up the pros and cons of unions, with particular reference to unions' excessive demands to companies, and the consequent friction between companies and employees. For better understanding, the interviewer relates the topic to the GEO, which is the Graduate Employees Organization at UIUC. In continuation of the talk about unions, as a last question, the topic of unions is developed to how unions can be better without friction. These four recordings represent instances of how a topic is initiated from the test taker's major and study area.

Another pattern is found in the recordings of 5A, 6C and 1D. A brief description of topic initiation and development each interview is in the following. Interview 5A begins with a question about what the candidate likes to do for fun. In response to the candidate's answer that he loves physical activities over video games, the interviewer extends the topic to whether the candidate was physically active in his childhood—comparing the country the candidate is from, Columbia, and the U.S. Additional questions were asked about the difference between Columbia and the U.S. in terms of compulsory education. The interview ends with possible solutions about physical inactivity among youth by providing funding for physical activity. Interview 6C begins with the question of how the test taker spends time for fun. The candidate's love of watching TV as a pastime is moved to the current issue of children's inactivity, and the interviewer expresses her concern about such a phenomenon. The interviewee also agrees with this concern and shares research findings from her reading that excessive exposure to TV in children under the age of 3 makes such children less likely develop language skills. Interview 1D begins with the question of how often the test taker visits his country. Since the candidate is an international student who might frequently use airports for travel, the interviewer associated the topic with terrorist attacks, centering on safety features added to airports. For the question as to whether those procedures and features would help for safety enhancement, the interviewee gives a positive response to them and adds that sacrificing a small amount of time is necessary for the overall safety of flights.

As was mentioned earlier, the EPI is an unscripted interview test in which interviewers are not provided interview agendas prior to the test. Interviewers are required to lead an interview maintaining a topic without having abrupt topic transitions which is unrelated to what they had been talking at a particular time of their dialogue. It is unforeseeable how the interviewer develops topics and what kinds of questions the interviewee would receive because

each interview consists of an individualized test and has its own steps in topic development. For example, interviews with the same topic might follow an entirely different topic development or vice versa.

"The format of the interview is conversational, not exam-like"

Retrieved on Oct 18, 2010 from *http://cte.illinois.edu/testing/oral_eng/testproc.html*

The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) describes the EPI by opening with the above statement. In addition, the name of the test, the English Proficiency Interview, reveals itself as a test that is conducted via the means of an interview. Although the test is called an "interview", it is conducted as a relatively unstructured conversation – as the data in this project indicate. This might sound contradictory, as conversation and an interview do not share the same features as a speech event and differ in many respects. This led me to raise the following question: Does the EPI needs to be viewed as an interview? Or is it somewhere between a conversation and an interview on the continuum? It would be good to have a broad picture of the EPI in both aspects of conversations and interviews in the following.

A salient feature of everyday conversation is that topics are spontaneously created and negotiated. A conversation is unplanned and locally managed (Johnson, 2001). In terms of topic initiation and its development, there is no pre set questions or agendas in the EPI. Topics are created on a test spot and negotiated in the course of discourse and controlled locally. Brown and Yule (1993) also asserted that in conversation, topics are not being fixed beforehand but are being negotiated in the process of conversing. Each interview of the EPI forms an individualized set of discourse developed in the course of conversing. The EPI possesses the feature of everyday conversation in terms of topic spontaneity and its negotiation during the interview.

In regards to the aspects of interviews, it is useful to re-visit the work of Silverman (1976):

> 1. There is some degree of asymmetry in the exchanges between interviewer and interviewee.
>
> 2. Questions are provided by one person (or a group of persons), and the talk of some other person is to be seen as answers to the questions.
>
> 3. One person is solely responsible for beginning and ending the interaction, for ending a topic and introducing a new topic, and for formulating the talk. (Silverman 197, p.142-44, cited in van Lier 1989, p. 497-98, cited in Johnson 2001, p.58)

As for degree of asymmetry in the exchanges between interviewer and interviewee, there exists certainly degree of asymmetry between an interviewer and a test taker in the EPI. Although EPI requires test takers' contribution in developing topics and formulating questions, taking into consideration that interviews occur under a test environment, the EPI necessarily brings asymmetrical distribution of power between an interviewer and the test taker.

With the same vein, the EPI can be viewed as a co-operative work between the interviewer and the interviewee in the sense that they build a set of discourse together within their own topic. Many instances, the interviewer provides personal revelations in developing topics, not just asking questions and it is often seen that the test taker ask questions about topics as well. But, it is most likely that the EPI follows the format of an interview: questions are mainly provided by an interviewer and the interviewee gives answers to those questions.

It is observed that the interviewer is the person who begins and ends interaction, introduces a new topic and ends a topic in the EPI. However, not necessarily is interviewer solely responsible for formulating talk. As was stated previously, test taker contributes to formulating

talk and to developing topics because test taker′s response affects progress of the talk. Thus, it

can be said that the EPI has features of an interview as it follows most of three characteristics

above.

The question where the EPI belongs between two categories (conversation vs. interview)

lacks significance because the test has both features. But examining the interview process itself

would provide an opportunity for interested researchers and the test administrator to identify

performance features that verify the quality of conversational interaction in interview tests. A

tentative conclusion can be drawn at this point that within the interview format, the EPI has

aspects of everyday conversation in terms of spontaneous topic initiation and development and

possess features of an interview as well. Taken together, the EPI stands somewhere between a

conversation and an interview on the continuum.

Limitations

When interpreting the results of the present study, substantial care is required because the

data cannot function as representative speech of the EPI. The interviews were collected from the

first field trial test in 2009, at a time when the structure of the test was not completely settled.

With a further consultation with the CTE test administrator, I was informed that the test has

changed and evolved since the trial test. Therefore, findings reported in this data are strictly

restricted to speech samples from the field trial in the Fall of 2009.

More specifically, only a small number of speech samples, 7 recordings, were used for

analysis. In addition, data were selected from the high proficiency level that met the following

two criteria: the ones that passed (level of 5 or above), and the ones that were interviewed by the

master interviewer. Thus, a much larger amount of data from the operating EPI is suggested to be

collected in order to examine the process of topic development. In addition, interview samples of both 'failed' and 'passed' need to be collected in order to examine how topics are developed across candidates' levels of speaking ability.

Taking into consideration that the EPI is an unscripted interview test, it necessarily entails variation among interviewers. In other words, interviewer variation and its effect on test takers' performance need to be investigated in order to provide stronger evidence to the EPI as a valid test of oral proficiency for ITAs. In this study, I intentionally selected one interviewer, who is the master interviewer for the test, as this person had substantial experience in conducting interviews. She had gone through an ACTFL workshop in which the EPI borrowed procedures and trained interviewers via demonstrations. In the oral proficiency interview, the capacity of interviewers in eliciting ratable language samples and being able to lead interview sessions for candidates to demonstrate his or her best language ability is crucial. It should be noted that raters at the time of the field trial were not yet fully trained and thus, this master interviewer was considered as the optimal subject for this study.

The factors mentioned above contributed to the limitations of the present study and thus, cause the study to be limited in reaching a conclusion about the characteristics of the EPI. As was previously stated, descriptions in this study are entirely based on the investigator's observations and interpretations. Therefore, views might vary on the discourses in interpreting the excerpts of this study. The nature of descriptive and qualitative study using discourse analysis opens the way to a discussion about research questions found herein.

Future study

It would be useful and helpful in complementing rater training if further research examines how topics are developed depending on the test taker's level of proficiency. It would be helpful to create a protocol when interviewing varying levels of test takers with reference to how to probe their speaking ability. Moreover, rater variation requires a close examination as a potential factor that affects test taker's performance. Although the EPI is equipped with devices that maximize its reliability with respect to interview protocols, considerable portions of the test are at the interviewer's discretion. Consequently, it entails the issue of inter-rater reliability as previous studies have shown that interviewers have their own styles which they like to employ across interviews, and that they retain these styles over time (Ross, 1996; Brown & Lumley, 1997; Reed & Halleck, 1997). Taking into consideration of the issue above, it would be helpful to minimize interviewer effects that involve dynamics of interviews and thus, ultimately affect test takers' performances.

Closing statement

This study explores how a topic is initiated and developed as the interviews progresses in the EPI, and it is my intent that this study might function as a starting point for further research with reference to discourse and interaction in the EPI.

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