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Teacher interventions following test takers' interactional troubles during classroom-based paired speaking tests at lower level

An exploration of (non) interventions and their effects on progressivity and test takers' independent interactional trouble solving

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Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel analyiert das Verhalten und die Inverventionen von vier Lehrpersonen während authentischer Paaprüfungen (n=21) im Deutsch als Fremdsprache-Unterricht der Sekundarstufe I (Zielniveau: A2). Die Prüfungen wurden hinsichtlich zweier Fragen konversationsanalytisch ausgewertet: a) Wie intervenieren Lehrpersonen während Paarprüfungen, wenn die Kandidat:innen Interaktionsprobleme haben? b) Welche Auswirkungen haben diese Interventionen auf die *progressivity* der Peer-Interaktion und auf die eigenständige Lösung von Interaktionsproblemen der Kandidat:innen? Die Analyse zeigt, dass sowohl die Häufigkeit als auch die Form der Interventionen von Lehrperson zu Lehrperson stark variieren. Die meisten dieser kooperativen Hilfestellungen fördern zwar die *progressivity* der Peer-Interaktion, aber nicht das selbstständige Lösen der Interaktionsprobleme durch die Kandidat:innen. Nur die Erlaubnis, sich von der Aufgabenstellung zu lösen, dient sowohl der *progressivity* als auch dem selbstständigen Lösen von Interaktionsproblemen der Kandidat:innen.

Schlagwörter: classroom-based assessment; Interaktionsprobleme; Prüferverhalten; Deutsch als Fremdsprache; Konversationsanalyse

Abstract

This paper analyses the behaviour and interventions of four teachers during authentic classroom-based paired speaking tests (n=21) in lower secondary schools in the German as a foreign language classroom (target level: A2). Conversation analysis was used to explore the tests with regard to two questions: a) How do the teacher-examiners intervene when the student-examinees face interactional troubles? b) What effect do these interventions have on the progressivity of the peer interaction and on the test takers' independent interactional trouble solving? The analysis shows that the scope and type of interventions vary greatly depending on the teacher and that, while most of these attempts at collaborative assistance are beneficial for the progressivity of the peer interaction, they do not foster test takers' independent interactional trouble solving ability. Only the permission to deviate from the task is conducive to both progressivity and test takers' independent interactional trouble solving.

Keywords: classroom-based assessment; interactional troubles; examiner behaviour; German as a foreign language; conversation analysis

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1. Introduction

This paper reports on a study that used videography of authentic classroom-based paired speaking tests to explore how these tests are conducted in lower secondary schools (grades 7–9, ages 12–15).[1] The speaking tests were filmed in the German as a foreign language classroom in French-speaking Switzerland,[2] where German is a compulsory subject and the target level of oral production and interaction is an A2 at the end of 9th grade. At this lower level of language proficiency, learners are rarely able to maintain a conversation themselves (see Council of Europe 2001: 74; Galaczi 2014) and are reliant upon a communication partner who is willing to help, such as a teacher who may clarify or repeat things to help students. In this paper, we therefore investigate teacher behaviour during paired speaking tests at a lower proficiency level. While teachers may also intervene for reasons such as exam management, we will focus on teacher-examiners' interventions following student-examinees interactional troubles. These interventions can be considered attempts at collaborative assistance. We analyse a) how the teachers intervene when the test takers encounter interactional troubles and b) how these interventions affect the progressivity of the peer interaction as well as the test takers' independent interactional trouble solving.

2. Background

2.1 Paired speaking tests at lower level

The use of paired speaking assessment is based primarily on the importance of interaction in the real world. As Roever and Wei Dai (2021: 23) point out, test takers' real-world language use typically involves interacting with others, and therefore "their ability to do so should be a core part of the information gathered on their language ability". Rydell (2019: 60) sees the rationale behind the paired format in encouraging "collaborative interaction, peer-scaffolding and negotiation of meaning". The advantages cited in relation to the paired format underscore that discussions between test takers (compared to the individual assessment format) elicit a wider range of interactional features, such as asking for clarification, asking questions and negotiating meaning (e. g. Brooks 2009; Ducasse & Brown 2009; Butler & Zeng 2011; Rydell 2019). As May (2009) points out, conversation management skills in particular, such as initiating a discussion, introducing a proposal or asking someone's opinion, are not usually covered in traditional oral proficiency interviews. In addition, the paired format is seen as more practical and time-efficient, especially in school contexts with large classes (Taylor & Wigglesworth, 2009). However, there are also disadvantages to paired speaking tests. The fact that the interaction is co-constructed leads to difficulties in assessing the performance of individual participants (see McNamara 1997). Several studies have demonstrated the influence of the interlocutor on the performance of the test taker, via factors such as the proficiency level of the co-examinee (e. g. Nakatsuhara 2006; Davis 2009), acquaintanceship (O'Sullivan 2002) or gender (O'Sullivan 2000; Brown & McNamara 2004).

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[2] Switzerland is divided into four language regions; in every region, one of the four national languages is the official language (the linguistic territoriality principle). In French-speaking Switzerland the official language is French, and there is very little contact with the other national languages. Consequently, German is considered to be and taught as a foreign language.

Since interaction is a process of co-constructing meaning in context, it follows that it depends, among other variables, on the proficiency level of both interaction partners. At lower proficiency levels, interactional troubles and word searches are frequent. At beginner level (A1), according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR), communication is even "totally dependent on repetition at a slower rate of speech, rephrasing and repair" and at level A2 a test taker is still "rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord" (Council of Europe 2001: 74).

2.2 Interactional trouble and progressivity of interaction

As mentioned above, *interactional troubles* are to be expected in paired speaking tests at beginner level due to the test takers' limited language skills. Interactional troubles have been documented in L2 classrooms (Sert & Jacknick 2015) and paired speaking assessment (Hırçın Çoban & Sert 2020). They usually manifest themselves as a halt in the unfolding interaction. Hırçın Çoban and Sert frame interactional troubles as "a gap (e. g., a very long silence) in talk, and no parties contribute to the ongoing interaction in the relevant next sequential slot" (Hırçın Çoban & Sert 2020: 65). In their study on how test takers resolve interactional troubles in paired speaking assessment, Hırçın Çoban and Sert identify two requirements which test takers need to fulfil in an interactional activity: "(1) maintain and contribute to a topic and (2) establish mutual understanding when problems arise" (Hırçın Çoban & Sert 2020: 65). Both are key aspects of *progressivity*, which is a major principle for organising talk in conversation analysis. Schegloff (2007) uses the concept to refer to the advancement of talk within turns and sequences: "Moving from some element to a hearably-next-one with nothing intervening is the embodiment of, and the measure of, progressivity" (Schegloff 2007: 15). According to Kley, who studied how learners at lower proficiency level manage topics in a paired speaking task, "a loss of progressivity or a delay can happen when something occurs next that was not due next, such as a repair initiation or the display of difficulty in responding to a question" (Kley 2019: 316). Although progressivity is an important principle of how talk-in-interaction is organised, maintaining progressivity is still under-researched in the assessment context. In their study on how adult, advanced (B2) test takers of paired speaking tests maintained progressivity in face of interactional troubles, Hırçın Çoban and Sert (2020: 70) identified three practices that test takers use to maintain progressivity. These differ in their degree of mutuality ranging from "transition to a subtopic" as the least collaborative practice to "formulating an understanding" and "collaborative sequences". While their study focuses on test takers' ability to solve interactional trouble independently, our study focuses on teacher-examiners' interventions and on how they affect the progressivity of the peer interaction and student-examinees' independent solving of their interactional troubles.

2.3 Examiner behaviour during paired speaking tests

Research into examiner behaviour has mainly focused on the individual assessment format. Brown's (2003) and subsequently Nakatsuhara's (2008) conversation analyses of one test taker being interviewed by two different interviewers revealed that the interviewers' behaviour (questioning techniques, topic expansion and management, type of feedback) influenced the test taker's performance, which in turn affected the raters' judgement.

In the case of paired or group speaking tests, the examiner's behaviour largely depends on the proficiency level of the test takers: the lower the level, the less likely it is that the test takers are able to collaborate independently and manage the exam on their own. Galaczi (2014: 557), who was interested in the candidate/candidate interaction (and not in examiner behaviour) during the Cambridge English paired speaking tests at different proficiency levels, therefore excluded the A2 test from her analysis because "[a]t A2 the candidate/candidate interaction task includes a great deal of scaffolding and examiner control". At beginner level, teacher-examiners are thus much more likely to intervene in a paired exam to collaboratively assist the test takers in case of interactional troubles. Butler and Zeng's study (2011) on classroom-based EFL speaking tests in a Chinese primary school furthermore showed that teachers' behaviour during paired-speaking tests depended on how the pairs were put together. When a dominant and a passive student were assessed together, the teacher was much more involved in the interactions to ensure that the less dominant student could participate in the tasks. However, as Tschirner (2001) points out from a proficiency testing perspective, it is not always easy for examiners to decide whether one test taker is dominating and thus whether to intervene. Consequently, interventions may be random, reducing the reliability of a paired speaking test. He therefore criticises the paired assessment format for testing lower level students. Hamp-Lyons (2017: 108), on the other hand, takes a critical view of the examiners in group orals for a different reason. Looking at paired-speaking tests from a learning-oriented assessment perspective, she suggests that examiners should intervene much less in the discussion part of the Cambridge First Certificate: "Taking the interlocutor out of the frame would free up the potential for candidates' co-construction of language to solve a problem or perform a task and would thus provide a different perspective on candidates' skills".

Overall, the influence of the examiner's behaviour on peer interaction is discussed critically in the literature. However, there is little research on the actual behaviour, especially that of teacher-examiners during classroom-based paired speaking tests. Teachers conducting paired speaking tests face particular challenges because they are usually required to take on the role of both test administrator and rater, while still being the teacher of the class (cf. Teasdale & Leung 2000; Koizumi 2022). To date, little is known about how teacher-examiners prioritise their different roles during a speaking test and how they react when test takers have interactional troubles. On the one hand, teachers should intervene as little as possible in the peer interaction, as their interventions may ultimately influence the test takers' performance, which then should be taken into account in the rating. On the other hand, teachers often want to prevent the speaking test from becoming a frightening, demotivating experience. Teachers can therefore either decide to intervene as little as possible, trusting that student-examinees already have the communicative strategies to solve their interactional troubles themselves, or they can decide to intervene to support students and keep the progressivity of the interaction as high as possible. This paper focuses on this trade-off by studying teacher behaviour during classroom-based paired speaking tests in the secondary school context, focussing on learners of German as a foreign language. More specifically, it addresses the following questions:

1. How do teacher-examiners intervene during a paired speaking test when student-examinees have interactional troubles?
2. What effect do teacher interventions have a) on the progressivity of the peer interaction and b) on the test takers' independent interactional trouble solving?

3. The Study

In this paper we analyse classroom-based paired speaking tests[3] from four different secondary school teachers (n=21 dyads, n=40 students).[4] The four teachers are from the French-speaking part of the Canton of Fribourg. In French-speaking Switzerland, German is taught as a compulsory first foreign language from 3rd grade (age nine), and English is introduced in 5th grade (age 11). The curriculum is based on the CEFR and the European Language Portfolio and defines learning objectives for three proficiency levels in German for the end of lower secondary school in 9th grade: A2.2 in spoken interaction and production for the lower track, B1.1 for the intermediate track, and B1.2 for the highest track (CIIP 2012: 12). In the Canton of Fribourg teachers should regularly assess receptive and productive skills and give separate marks for each of these skills. At the end of a textbook unit, they therefore usually alternate between listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing or speaking tests. Per school year, teachers must conduct two to four graded speaking tests at the end of a learning process. The tests are developed and administered by the teachers and usually have the purpose of checking the learning objectives of the unit. Teachers are free to choose the test format (i. e. individual test, paired test, presentation, etc.). In our study, authentic speaking tests were filmed in order to analyse teachers' behaviour during these tests. As our study is an observational study interested in how teachers conduct speaking tests at lower secondary level, we did not give the teachers any guidelines but simply asked them when they would be conducting the next speaking test and whether we could film it.[5] After the filmed speaking tests, retrospective interviews were held with teachers.

3.1 Participants

The teachers were recruited via school principals and personal networks and took part in the study voluntarily. They are therefore likely to have an interest in assessing speaking and feel reasonably confident in this area.

Students were between 13–16 years old and also participated voluntarily in the study. Most students indicated that they spoke French, the language of schooling, as one of their languages at home.

Teacher	Eva	Mia	Lea	Tom
Teaching experience	4 years	25 years	7 years	20 years
Number of filmed tests	4	6	6	5
Class	8th grade (age: 13–14), lower track	8th grade (age: 13–14) lower track	8th grade (age: 13–14), intermediate track	9th grade (age: 14–15), lower track

Table 1: Class and Teacher Characteristics

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[3] The analysis reported here is part of a larger study (Peyer et al. 2025). In the first phase of the study, we observed formative assessment practices (see Peyer et al. 2023); in the second phase, we focused on summative assessment practices.

[4] An odd number of students were filmed in two classes. In both classes, one student took the test twice (whereby only the first performance was assessed by the teacher).

[5] A total of seven teachers agreed to take part in the study. Four of them carried out paired tests, three carried out other test formats. This article focuses on the four teachers who carried out paired speaking tests.

As can be seen in table 1, exams were filmed either in the lower or intermediate track,[6] in 8th or 9th grade. All teachers hold a teaching degree in German for the lower secondary level and have taught German as a foreign language for a minimum of four years at that level. Tom is a native speaker of German, Mia, Lea and Eva are non-native speakers.

3.2 Material

The assessment tasks were developed by the teachers themselves, together with other teachers of German from their schools. All tests were graded and counted towards the students' mark in their report card. Eva and Mia created the assessment activity together as they teach at the same school. The purpose of their exam was to test the learning objectives of the textbook unit they had just covered with their classes. In their test, students were instructed to talk to their partner about fashion/shopping—the topic of the textbook unit—and ask and answer at least five questions each. Some pictures, German interrogative pronouns (e. g. what, when, where) and four verbs in German ("kaufen, mögen, shoppen, tragen" [to buy, to like, to shop, to wear]) were printed on the exam sheet to help. Lea's assessment activity, which she adapted from a colleague, also had the purpose of testing the learning objectives of the textbook unit. The students were asked to talk about pocket money by first asking and then answering five questions on the topic or vice-versa. They were assigned a role (A or B) with a fictional profile that contained information about the amount of pocket money, student job, savings goal, etc. They were also given interrogative pronouns and a few expressions in German on the exam sheet (the verbs "sparen, jobben, ausgeben" [to save, to do (casual) jobs, to spend money] and the adjectives "pleite, zufrieden" [broke, satisfied]). Tom's assessment activity was inspired by a part of the cantonal final German exam that students usually take at the end of secondary school. In his test, the students had to organise an activity together (trip to the cinema, swimming pool, etc.) and discuss various points such as time, means of transport, etc. His exam sheet also contained useful phrases in German ("Wir können … gehen/fahren/kaufen" [We can go/buy …], „Ich will/möchte … sehen/nehmen/kaufen" [I want to/would like to see/take/buy …]). The words or expressions that were printed on the exam sheets had all been part of the textbook unit or part of the preparation for the speaking test. For the most part, they were meant to help students by providing some of the lexical items or useful structures. All four teachers had trained their students to the test format.

The semi-structured, retrospective interviews[7] with teachers lasted for about an hour and covered the following three phases: a) the exam preparation and the task b) the rating and c) the exam follow-up (assessment-for-learning, feedback). In part b of the interviews, the teachers were shown a selection (2–3) of the previously filmed exams and were asked to explain how they had arrived at the assessment, based on the completed assessment grid. While doing this, the teachers made occasional comments on their examiner behaviour, which are paraphrased in this article.

3.3 Data collection

The data were collected by the research team between May and June 2022. All tests were administered by the teachers. The camera was set up in such a way that the examinees and the teacher could be seen on the film. During the exams, the researchers were not present in the room. All four teachers gave the students preparation time immediately before the test, during which the students could look at the exam sheet; none of the teachers allowed the students to take notes.

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[6] In the 2021/22 school year, about 19 % of the students in the canton of Fribourg were in the lowest track, 41 % in the intermediate and 37 % in the highest track (J.-M. Oberson, Service de l'enseignement obligatoire de langue française, personal communication, 15.09.2023).

[7] The interview guideline can be found here: *https://osf.io/vwuf2/*.

The retrospective interviews with teacher-examiners were conducted online via MS Teams on the same or the following day.

3.4 Data analysis

The video-recorded exams usually lasted between four and five minutes and were transcribed in the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA 24 (VERBI Software 2023) using GAT 2 (Selting et al. 2009) minimal transcription conventions with some of the basic transcription conventions (i. e. prolongation and emphasis). The teacher interviews were also transcribed, using GAT 2 minimal transcription, and subsequently examined in MAXQDA using methods of content analysis (Mayring 2015). For this, the research team developed a category system based on the research questions, specialist literature and the data. It focuses mainly on assessment criteria, exam preparation and assessment for learning, and also contains the code "teacher behaviour". The code was assigned for (the rare) comments teachers made about their own examiner behaviour when watching the filmed tests. For the purposes of this paper, the codings "teacher behaviour" were retrieved, and teacher's expressed views on repeatedly observed behaviour are paraphrased in this article.

The transcripts of the speaking tests were first read following the standard of "unmotivated examination" (Schegloff 1996: 172). In doing so, we realised that the four teachers intervene in an exam with different frequency and in different moments or contexts, one of which is when the test takers encounter an interactional trouble. This led us to explore teacher interventions following test takers' interactional troubles and their effect on the progressivity of the peer interaction and on test takers' independent interactional trouble solving. To this end, we made a collection of cases where interactional troubles between the students occurred and the progressivity of the peer interaction slowed down or halted. In line with Hırçın Çoban and Sert (2020: 71), we operationalised interactional troubles as displays of difficulties which can be expressed verbally or through "long silences, hesitation markers, gaze aversion, smiles, gazing towards the co-interactant, lateral headshakes, thinking face, gazing towards the rater, and other non-verbal cues" (Hırçın Çoban & Sert 2020: 71). Subsequently, we performed a sequential analysis to describe in detail how teachers behave or intervene in these moments (i. e. if and what kind of collaborative assistance[8] they gave). The analysis showed that it often takes more than one intervention by the teacher before the peer interaction can be resumed and progressivity is restored. In a further step we therefore analysed how supportive teacher interventions are for the progressivity of the peer interaction and for students' independent interactional trouble solving. In terms of teacher-examiner interventions, we operationalise progressivity as follows:

1. Teacher interventions are conducive to the progressivity of peer interaction if the peer interaction can be resumed after the intervention without an additional verbal intervention by the teacher.
2. Teacher interventions are not conducive to the progressivity of the peer interaction if additional interventions by the teacher are necessary before peer interaction can continue or if student-examinees have to ask follow-up questions.

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[8] In this paper, we use the term *collaborative assistance* for all attempts by teachers to restore the conversation between the test takers after they have encountered an interactional trouble.

4. Findings

The four teachers analysed all have different ways of reacting to interactional troubles. In the following, typical interventions of the four teachers to interactional troubles will be presented. The aim is to illustrate how these affect the progressivity of the peer interaction and the test takers' interactional trouble solving.

The first teacher, Tom, never offers any help in the case of an interactional trouble. He never intervenes in a test, even if the interaction between the two student-examinees falters or stops for several seconds and collaborative assistance from him could have helped to resume the peer interaction. He looks at the examinees and takes notes, but otherwise shows no reaction, as excerpt 1 shows.

Excerpt 1: no verbal reaction (Tom, 9th grade, lower track, task: organising an activity)

```
01   S1:  (1.9) äm: (-) wer können wir äh einladen
                 um:     who can we uh invite
02   Tom: ((Tom looks at S2))
03   S2:  (4.2) äh ja (---)
                 uh yes
04   Tom: ((looks down at the grid))
05   S1:  äm: [((looks at the sheet, 1.2))]
          um:
06   S2:      [((shrugs his shoulders slightly, shakes his head
07        slightly)) ((whispers)) <(je sais pas)>]
                                  <(I don't know)>
08        ((S1 and S2 look at their task sheets,
09        Tom looks at S1, 4.4 sec.))
10   S1:  öh: können wi:r (--) gehen ins schwimmbad äh:
          uh: can we           go to the swimming pool uh:
11        ((looks at Tom, Tom looks at S1, ca. 1.5 sec.))
12        ((Tom and S1 look down))
13        am: (2.9) am nachmittag
          in:       in the afternoon
```

In the excerpt above, student S1 asks student S2 who they could invite, to which S2 replies "uh yes" after a long pause (line 3). S1 reacts to this display of trouble with "um" while looking for something on the task sheet (line 4). S2 at this point further expresses his interactional trouble by shrugging his shoulders and saying "I don't know" in French. Meanwhile, Tom does not offer S2 any help but instead turns his attention to the assessment grid after S2 has said the wrong answer "uh yes" (line 3). He then looks at S1 for several seconds (lines 8–9). S1 finally gets the conversation going again by simply asking another question, i. e. if they could go to the swimming pool (line 10). Her switch to a new topic is reminiscent of the "transition to a subtopic", a practice to which a majority of test takers in Hırçın Çoban and Sert's study (2020: 71 ff.) resorted to resolve an interactional trouble. By doing so she demonstrates a preference for the progressivity of the interaction over receiving an answer to her first question. Thus, thanks to S1, the test takers can continue their conversation after a long pause without help from the teacher.

In the retrospective interview, Tom expressed the opinion that the students should be able to solve their interactional troubles themselves. He explained his lack of support by saying that these 9th grade students had been practising sentences such as 'I don't understand' or 'can you repeat' since 7th grade and emphasised that such a simple interaction should be possible at the end of compulsory schooling (9th grade).

Mia, on the other hand, has a different stance to student-examinees' interactional troubles. Her behaviour during the exams is much more collaborative. A typical intervention of her is to immediately reformulate an incorrect or difficult to understand question from a test taker so that interactional troubles do not arise in the first place. A typical example of this is excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2: reformulation of incorrect question (Mia, 8th grade, lower track, task: talking about shopping/fashion)

```
01   S3: öh: wann (1.9) trägst du (1.6) shoppen
         uh: when       wear   you      shopping
02   Mia: ((to S4)) wann gehst du shoppen
                    when do you go shopping
03   S4: ((looks at Mia, nods, looks down at task sheet)) ich (-) shoppe:
                                                          i        shop:
04       in: (--) in ferien
         during:  during holidays
```

In excerpt 2, S3 hesitantly formulates a lexically incorrect question (l. 1): "when do you wear shopping". At that, Mia immediately reformulates the question correctly as "when do you go shopping" while looking at S4, the student who is supposed to answer the question (l. 2). S4 can then answer the question without much hesitation (l. 3–4).

In this sequence, Mia shows a preference for the progressivity of the interaction over the student-examinees' independent resolving of a (possible) interactional trouble. Since Mia is not looking at S3, she does not seem to be primarily concerned with the correction but with facilitating the peer interaction. Mia regularly uses this strategy of mediation between the two test takers in case of incorrect student questions, and it always proves to be effective in terms of progressivity. However, it usually remains unclear if her reformulation was indeed necessary or if the students would have been able to solve their (potential) interactional troubles on their own.

In the retrospective interview, Mia explains that she always reformulates questions when they do not make sense because she thinks that it is only right that the student-examinees get a question that does makes sense. With regard to the examination of students S3 and S4, Mia furthermore explains that she had intervened to give them security as the students lacked confidence.

Another type of collaborative assistance that Mia sometimes uses are clarification requests. When she herself has difficulties understanding the students, she usually switches to French and asks the student-examinee to clarify what he/she wanted to ask or say. A typical example for this intervention is excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3: Clarification request in language of schooling (Mia, 8th grade, lower track, task: talking about shopping)

```
01   S5:  ö:m (5.8) ä:m (1.2) wo ist (1.1) äh die shoppen (---)
          u:m       u:m       where is     uh the shopping
02   Mia: ((looks up quickly, looks at S5))
03   S5:  ((eye contact with Mia)) äm (1.5)
                                   Um
04   Mia: <hm qu'est-ce que t'aimerais dire [S5]>
          <hm what would you like to say    [S5]>
```

```
05   S5:                                   [äh]
                                           [uh]
06   S5:   <où il va faire le shopping>
           <where he goes shopping>
07   Mia:  oh WO shoppst du ((looks at S6)) [wo gehst du] shoppen
           oh WHERE do you shop             [where do you go] shopping
08   S5:                                    [ah wo shopps\]
                                            [ah where do shop\]
09   S6:   ä:m (2.3) ich shoppe
           um        I shop
10         ((looks at Mia, who is looking at grids, 1.0 sec.))
11         ((stares into space, 0.8 sec.))
12         äh: ((sucks in a breath)) (-) in ort02
           uh:                           in town02
```

In excerpt 3, after much hesitation, S5 formulates a question with the interrogative "wo" [where] that is incorrect. Mia looks at him in response (l. 2) and, after a short pause, switches to French to ask what S5 wanted to say. S5 does not hesitate for long before he answers Mia's clarification request in French. Mia then formulates a correct question in German (l. 7), which S5 immediately begins to repeat in line 8. Thus, the intervention of Mia leads to a (partial) learner uptake (Lyster & Ranta 1997: 49). His colleague, S6, can then hesitantly give a correct answer without having had to ask for help himself. Once more, Mia shows a preference for progressivity and does not wait for the test takers to try to solve a (possible) interactional trouble themselves. It again remains unclear if they would have had the necessary strategies to do so.

The third teacher, Eva, although using the same activity as Mia, is much more reserved than Mia during the exams. Eva usually does not intervene verbally, even if there is a long period of silence. She nods regularly, particularly when the student-examinees have direct eye contact with her, even if a student's statement was not correct. During the four exams filmed, she only intervenes four times verbally after an interactional trouble, usually after a test taker has expressed a comprehension problem (see excerpt 4 for an example).

Excerpt 4: request to ask a question (Eva, 8th grade, lower track, task: speaking about shopping/ fashion)

```
01   S7:   (-) öh: ((looks at Eva)) (-) welche kleider trast du: in heute
               uh:                      what clothes wear you: in today
02   S8:   (1.5) öh: (5.2) ich weiss nicht ((smiles and looks at Eva))
                 uh:       i don't know
03   S7:   ((smiles and looks at Eva))
04   Eva:  hm_hm ((gesture from S8 to S7)) du stellst auch fragen (unv.)
                                           you also ask questions (unint.)
05   S8:   äm:: was ist deine lieblingsfarbe ((looks at S7))
           um:: what is your favourite colour
```

In excerpt 4, S7 hesitantly formulates a question that is incorrect in several places, including the incorrect conjugation/pronunciation of the verb ("trast" instead of 'trägst' [wear], l. 1). S8 then hesitates, flagging her difficulties with a hesitation marker and a long pause until she replies with "I don't know". Next, she smiles and looks at Eva (l. 2), whereupon S7 also smiles and looks at Eva (l. 3). At that, Eva gestures from S8 to S7 and tells S8 to ask another question (l. 4). She thus initiates a topic shift, which allows the students to solve their interactional trouble without linguistic help from the teacher. Subsequently, S8 asks another question, and the progressivity of the peer interaction is restored (l. 5).

In the retrospective interview, Eva explains that she did not have time to review strategies such as asking for help or repetition with her students before the exam, therefore she felt she had to support the student-examinees in some situations. She generally tries not to intervene in a paired speaking exam, unless she feels that students need to be reassured before they can continue speaking.

Of the four teachers analysed, Lea intervenes most frequently during the exams and shows the most collaborative behaviour. In case of an interactional trouble caused by a word search, Lea tries to help the test takers in a variety of ways, such as using a non-verbal scaffolding (e. g. pointing to a useful phrase on the task sheet), clueing a word or even directly saying the word the test taker is looking for. In addition, she sometimes allows or encourages test takers to deviate from the profile they should use and to just say anything instead of what is written in the profile. In excerpt 5, S9 is supposed to say that he has a student job as a cleaner, according to his profile. However, he obviously does not know the word for cleaning.

Excerpt 5: permission to deviate from the profile (Lea, 8th grade, intermediate track, task: speaking about pocket money)

```
01    S10: hm und in was jobbst du ((looks at S9))
           hm and in what do you work
02    S9:  ich jobbe in äh (1.9) äh: <ah (non) ça je sais pas dire> (2.7)
           i work in uh          uh: <ah (no) that I don't know how to say>
03         äh (1.0)
           uh
04    Lea: du musst nicht GENAU sagen was auf dem foto ist du kannst a:uch
           you don't have to say EXACTLY what is in the photo you can a:lso
05         ((circular hand movement)) (---) einfach eine information geben
                                            simply give an information
6     S9:  okay ich jobben in (1.5) äh ich <help>
           okay i work in           uh i <help>
07         ((looks at Lea, scratches his head)) [mein jobben ist zu helpen]
                                                [my job is to help]
08    Lea:                                      [((looks at S9, nods))    ]
09    S9:  (-) äh neuest (--) äh: (---) neuest schu:\ (-) sch\sch: öh schule
               uh newest      uh:       newest schoo:\    sch\sch: uh school
10    Lea: ((looks at S9, nods)) hm_hm
11    S9:  öh in der <co> <of> ort03 (-) mit (-)
           uh in the <co[9]> <of> town03 with
12         den mathematik und französisch
           the maths and french
13    Lea: sehr gut (-) fantastisch
           very good    fantastic
```

Lea reacts to S9's statement that he cannot say what he sees on his task sheet (l. 2) by allowing him to deviate from the profile (l. 4–5, "simply give an information"). Upon this, S9 immediately starts formulating an answer to the question about a part-time job: with much pausing to search for expressions and occasional lexical recourse to English ("help" instead of 'helfen' in l. 6 and l. 7; "of" in l. 11), he expresses in simple words that he gives private tuition in maths and French at a secondary school. As the student searches for words, the teacher nods encouragingly (l. 9) but otherwise does not help any further. The teacher's permission to name any other job instead of the specific one mentioned on the profile thus enabled the students to solve their interactional trouble without linguistic help from the teacher.

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[9] "CO" is "cycle d'orientation", i. e. secondary school.

Lea allows examinees to deviate from the profile two more times, and in each case, it leads to a resumption of the peer interaction without further help. In these moments, Lea prioritises the progressivity of the peer interaction over task fulfilment. The permission to deviate from the profile allows the teacher to assist rather indirectly, i. e. without mentioning words or structures in the L2.

As mentioned above, another intervention strategy Lea repeatedly uses in case of a word search is the clueing of a word (McHoul 1990: 355). In excerpt 6, S9, the same student as in excerpt 5, is supposed to say what he spends his pocket money on and to use the information in the profile, which features a picture of a gift as well as a picture of French fries and a sausage.

Excerpt 6: clueing of a word (Lea, 8th grade, intermediate track, task: speaking about pocket money)

```
01   S9:  ((looks at task sheet)) (--) öm (-) ich kaufen mein geld
                                       um     I buy my money
02        für geschenke und öh geschenke für mein freundI(n)
          for presents and uh presents for my (girl)friend
03   Lea: ((smiles and nods))
04   S9:  (-) und öh (1.7) äh: (1.2) <saucisse> ((looks up to Lea))
              and uh       eh:       <sausage>
05   Lea: ((looks at S9, 1.0)) was ist das wort auf deutsch für <sau-
            cisse>
                               what is the word in German for <sausage>
06        ((gesture with palms facing upwards))
07   S9:  ah <mais je [sais       ]>
          ah <but I   [know       ]>
08   Lea:             [oder kennst] du [öh]
                      [or do you know] [uh]
09   S9:                               [(<c'est>)] öh frü\ frü\ früst
                                       [<(it's)>] uh frü\ frü\ früst
10         ((looks at Lea)) <non> (--) ((looks at sheet))
                            <no>
11   Lea:  po
12   S9:   ((looks at Lea))
13   Lea:  (---) pom
14   S9:   (-) pom f[rüst  ]
15   Lea:           [pommes]
                    [fries ]
16   S9:  pommes
          fries
17   Lea: pommes ((nods)) okay ((looks at S10))
          fries
```

As S9 cannot recall the German word 'Wurst' [sausage], he uses the French word "saucisse" and looks up to Lea (l. 4). In return, Lea tries to elicit the correct word in German by simply asking a counter-question, namely what the German word for "saucisse" is (l. 5) (for questions as elicitation technique cf. Lyster & Ranta 1997: 48). S9 then begins an answer with "mais" [but] (l. 7), but Lea does not wait for the end of his answer and starts to clue the German word 'Pommes' [fries], which are also shown in the picture (l. 8). However, S9 still seems to be looking for the word for 'sausage', as he continues saying: "c'est eh frü\ frü\ früst" (l. 9), whereby "früst" could be a metathesis of the plural 'Würste' [sausages]. Lea, however, continues to clue the word for 'fries': "po" (l. 11) and, receiving no answer, "pom" (l. 13) to which S9 replies with "pom früst" (l. 14), an expression reminiscent of the French word 'pommes frites' [French fries], which is also used in German, but also containing the word guess "früst", which he had already produced above for 'sausage'. At this point, Lea interrupts him to say the whole word "Pommes" this time (l. 15). S9 responds to this direct correction by repeating the word "Pommes" (l. 16), whereupon the teacher again says "Pommes", nodding in confirmation (l. 17).

This example, as well as others in our collection, shows that clueing by teacher-examiners in the case of a word search may be a well-meant attempt at collaborative assistance. However, it neither helps the test takers to solve their interactional trouble independently nor does it foster the progressivity of the interaction. On the contrary, the above intervention by Lea has clearly interrupted the interaction between the two student-examinees and it takes three teacher interventions before the examinee finally is able to say the word "Pommes".

In the interview, Lea did not comment on her intervention behaviour. However, she explained that the aim of the test was to assess students' ability to talk about pocket money rather than to test specific vocabulary. She had added the profile to an existing speaking task so that the student-examinees knew immediately what to talk about and would not be blocked. Thus, it only follows that she intervenes in case of a word search and tries to help by, for instance, allowing the student-examinees to deviate from the profile if they do not know a specific expression.

5. Discussion

In this paper, we analysed how teachers at lower secondary level (level A2) behave during classroom-based paired speaking tests when the test takers have interactional troubles and what effects teacher interventions have on the progressivity of the peer interaction and on test takers' (independent) interactional trouble solving.

On the whole, the four teachers behave very differently during the tests. While one teacher, Tom, shows no reactions and concentrates fully on the rating, another teacher, Lea, is very involved in the tests and regularly offers collaborative assistance in a variety of ways. The two other teachers, Eva and Mia, lie between these two extremes. Eva is very reserved and usually only intervenes verbally when a test taker verbalises that he/she does not understand something. Mia, on the other hand, intervenes more frequently, usually immediately after a (potential) interactional trouble in an almost standardised way, mostly by rephrasing questions from test takers that are incorrect and thus difficult to understand.

Various explanations for the differing examiner behaviours observed can be considered. One possible explanation are the different expectations that the teachers had of their students (see the interview data in chapter 4). Another explanation may derive from the different test purposes. Tom, for instance, uses a proficiency test that was not part of the regular class textbook to test oral interaction skills, whereas the other three teachers are interested in determining whether their students have met the learning objectives of a textbook unit. For this reason, the assessment of interaction skills was most likely not foregrounded in these achievement tests, which is contradictory in itself, as the tests remain paired speaking tests. Nevertheless, the task can at best only partially explain the differences in teacher behaviour, as Eva and Mia used the same task and yet behaved very differently. Another reason for the observed different examiner behaviours may be that teachers—unlike in standardised tests—must perform several roles during an exam: they are test administrators and raters but also, simultaneously, the students' teacher and at times their interlocutors (see Teasdale & Leung 2000; Koizumi 2022). The results suggest that the four teachers weighted these roles differently: while Tom is mostly in the role of a rater, Lea is often in the role of the teacher who offers assistance and tries to motivate the student-examinees by giving positive feedback. Our results show that teachers should be made aware of their different roles during an exam and that they neither can nor should fill all of them equally well and at the same time. For instance, exam management (and possibly rating) should be the focus during paired tests, while the interlocutor role (and not simultaneously that of rater) is essential during an individual test.

As far as the effects of the teachers' behaviour and their interventions on the students' interaction are concerned, Tom's student-examinees are completely on their own. They can usually help themselves, although there are often very long pauses and a complete halt in progressivity before one student resumes the conversation, as many students lack the strategies to ask their colleague for repetition or help. The interventions of the other three teachers can usually restore the progressivity of the interaction quite efficiently, but this is often at the expense of the student-examinees' solving their interactional troubles without linguistic support from the teacher. Only a request to ask another question (Eva, excerpt 4) and the permission to deviate from the profile/task (Lea, excerpt 5) proved to be beneficial both for the progressivity of the peer interaction as well as for student-examinees' independent use of the target language. In both cases, the teachers did not need to give linguistic support in the L2, which in our view is a preliminary stage on the way to independent language use in interaction. In particular, the permission to deviate from the profile/task and to answer more freely makes it possible to check what test takers with very limited linguistic means can express and may also enable the test takers to experience a sense of achievement. Although the other teachers did not use assessment activities with profiles to stick to or deviate from, they could nevertheless have encouraged their students to try to say something else in case of a word search.

A further intervention which is very effective in terms of progressivity is the immediate reformulation of an almost incomprehensible question, a strategy of mediating between the two test takers that Mia regularly uses (see excerpt 2). While this practice can quickly restore the students' interaction it, however, deprives students of the opportunity of trying to solve their interactional troubles themselves. In fact, it remains unclear if Mia's immediate interventions are always necessary, or if the student-examinees would have been able to solve their (possible) interactional trouble by, for instance, asking for clarification. Similarly, a teacher's clarification request in the language of schooling (excerpt 3) also restores the interaction rather quickly but deprives the students of the opportunity to express their lack of understanding and thus potentially solve their interactional trouble themselves. These two practices thus counteract the advantages of paired speaking tests cited in specialist literature—that learners assume more responsibility and are less reactive than in individual tests, for example (Taylor & Wigglesworth 2009; Rydell 2019).

An intervention which—according to our data—is neither conducive to the progressivity of peer interaction nor to the test takers' interactional trouble solving is the clueing or eliciting of words in case of a word search. This can be seen in excerpt 6, in which S9 cannot think of the German word for 'sausage' and uses the French word "saucisse" instead, although he could have simply used the German word for 'food': 'Essen'. It remains unclear why Lea did not ask the student to deviate from the profile or use another compensation strategy instead of trying to clue the correct word in German. After all, excerpt 6 shows that clueing a word is difficult, can confuse and most likely demotivate the test taker and interrupt the interaction between the test takers for multiple turns. Hence, eliciting is contrary to the actual aim of paired speaking tests, which is testing a student's capacity to engage in an oral interaction.

6. Conclusion

Our conversation analysis of teachers' behaviour in case of test takers' interactional troubles showed that both the scope and type of teachers' interventions during paired speaking tests vary greatly depending on the teacher. This raises the question of fairness. The retrospective teacher interviews showed that although the teachers were thinking about fairness (e. g. Mia's explanation of why she rephrases incorrect questions), they did not take their interventions into account when assessing the students' performance. In order to make paired speaking tests fairer in this context, it would therefore be necessary to make teachers aware of the variability of their behaviour as well as of its possible impact on students' performance. The study findings thus point to a need for teacher training and professional development, especially regarding examiner behaviour, but also in task design. In particular, teachers should be made aware of the possible effects of different types of interventions[10] (e. g. word elicitations, reformulations of incorrect sentences) and of how teacher support can be included in the assessment of learners' performance, e. g. in the form of checklists.

Finally, it should of course be noted that the findings of our study have potential limitations. With our explorative approach, we cannot and do not claim generalisability of the results. It remains to be investigated on a larger empirical basis which of the teacher (non) interventions described in this article enable examinees to quickly resolve their interactional troubles themselves and which, on the contrary, unsettle them. In this respect, the perspective of the test takers themselves should also be taken into account. This should lead to the development of practical solutions and patters of action for teacher training programmes. Overall, more research into classroom-based paired speaking tests focussing on teachers' as well as students' practices to resolve interactional troubles is needed to better understand how and when teacher-examiners should or should not intervene and what effect their interventions have on student-examinees' performance and the assessment thereof.

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[10] To this end, some of the filmed speaking tests (n=18) of this study were pre-processed for the purpose of teacher training and professional development. Individuals working at higher education institutions are invited to contact moritz.sommet@unifr.ch to request these videos.

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