

'Whose performance?' revisited: Interaction and the testing and assessment of spoken language

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The paper 'Interaction' in second language performance assessment: Whose performance?' (McNamara, 1997) tried to address the problems raised for the traditionally cognitively oriented field of language assessment by a recognition of the social character of the assessment setting. In considering the contribution of others in the performance of any individual being assessed, it drew on insights from developments in discourse analysis, particularly Conversation Analysis, and other areas such as sociocultural theory, in order to raise the problem of the interpretability of the performance of any single individual in an assessment of oral language, which is the basis for scoring and score meaning. To what extent have these issues been addressed in research in language assessment in the years since? This paper considers the ongoing contribution of studies of interaction to the field of language assessment. It looks at recent research on paired and group oral assessment, attempts to develop scales for measuring interaction, the use of studies of discourse and interaction to address issues such as the gender of the participants in oral interviews, and developments in the field of Dynamic Assessment. It asks whether the questions raised in the earlier paper have been answered by this research, and if not, what ongoing dilemmas are posed for language assessment by work on its social and interactional character.

References

McNamara, T. 1997. 'Interaction' in second language performance assessment: Whose performance? *Applied Linguistics* 18,4: 446-466.