Applying a concept model of *learning-oriented language assessment* to a large-scale speaking test

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Acknowledgement

- **This project was carried out with Round 4 funding from Cambridge English Language Assessment**

In our study, we

- developed a concept model for *learning-oriented **language** assessment* (LOLA)

- piloted the model with current online materials for teachers engaged in Cambridge English: First preparation , and a small sample of Cambridge English: First Speaking test events

- considered how far a LOLA approach is reflected in these data

- made suggestions for ways to increase the language learning opportunities in the Cambridge English First speaking context
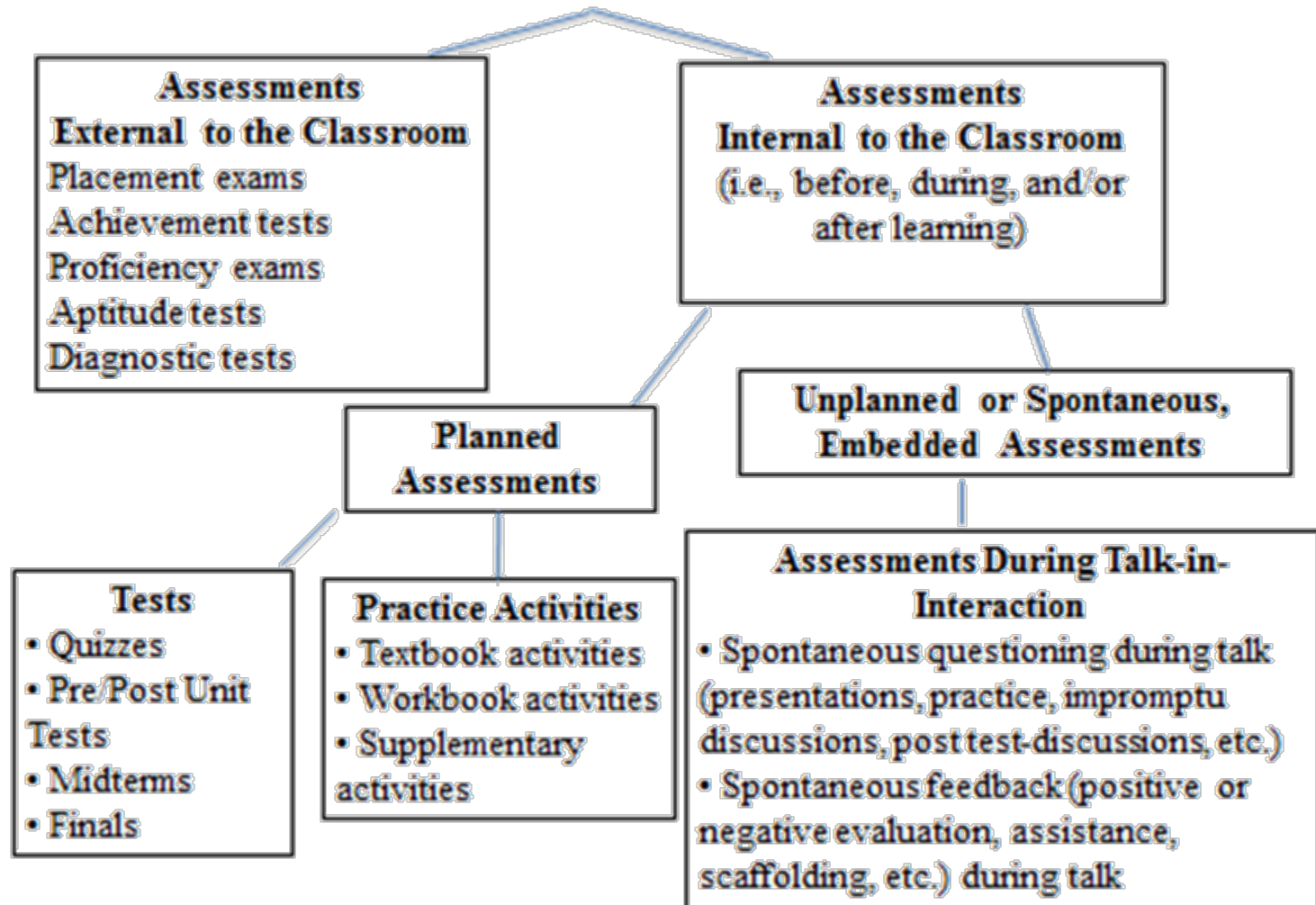
Starting from teaching and learning

The input to our language-specific model comes from the work of

1. David Carless and colleagues at the Hong Kong Institute of Education (now continuing at Hong Kong University)

2. Paul Black and colleagues, including Dylan Wiliam, at Kings College London

3. more recently and specifically in relation to language education, Jim Purpura, Carolyn Turner and colleagues

Each of these projects/sources start from the inside and work out, i.e., from the learner, the teacher, the classroom out to the wider context and to assessment

Ways to elicit language for assessment inside and outside the classroom
Turner, C.E. & Purpura, J.E. (forthcoming)

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Assessments External to the Classroom
Placement exams
Achievement tests
Proficiency exams
Aptitude tests
Diagnostic tests

Assessments Internal to the Classroom
(i.e., before, during, and/or after learning)

Planned Assessments

Unplanned or Spontaneous, Embedded Assessments

Tests
• Quizzes
• Pre/Post Unit Tests
• Midterms
• Finals

Practice Activities
• Textbook activities
• Workbook activities
• Supplementary activities

Assessments During Talk-in-Interaction
• Spontaneous questioning during talk (presentations, practice, impromptu discussions, post test-discussions, etc.)
• Spontaneous feedback (positive or negative evaluation, assistance, scaffolding, etc.) during talk

The model of language-oriented assessment emerges from assessment *for* learning

Learning-oriented assessment	Large-scale testing
Learning-focused tasks	Judgement-focused tasks
Scaffolded task completion	Support not permitted
Interactive/exploratory questioning	Interlocutor/assessor questioning
Learner-involved assessment	Learner-excluded assessment
Self-assessment	Authority assessment
Peer evaluation	Authority assessment
Learning-focused feedback	Judgement-focused feedback
Interlocutor/assessor scaffolding	Summary decision reporting
Immediate feedback	Delayed or no feedback
Focus on feed-forward	No feed-forward
Assessment is contingent	Assessment is absolute

The critical addition of **interactivity** ➲ learning-oriented **language** assessment

Learning-oriented language assessment is inherently interactive	Large-scale testing inevitably under-represents the constructs of language

Learning-oriented *language* assessment
LOLA

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Aims

- We wanted to know if the **LOLA** model would work

- Like Assessment for Learning (AfL) our model of Learning-Oriented Language Assessment (LOLA) builds theory on practice and observation in/of classrooms – of teachers, learners, materials and activities

- In looking at possibilities for a dynamic and productive relationship between teaching/learning and assessment, we wanted in particular – in keeping with our assessment *for* learning sources - to start from teaching/ learning.
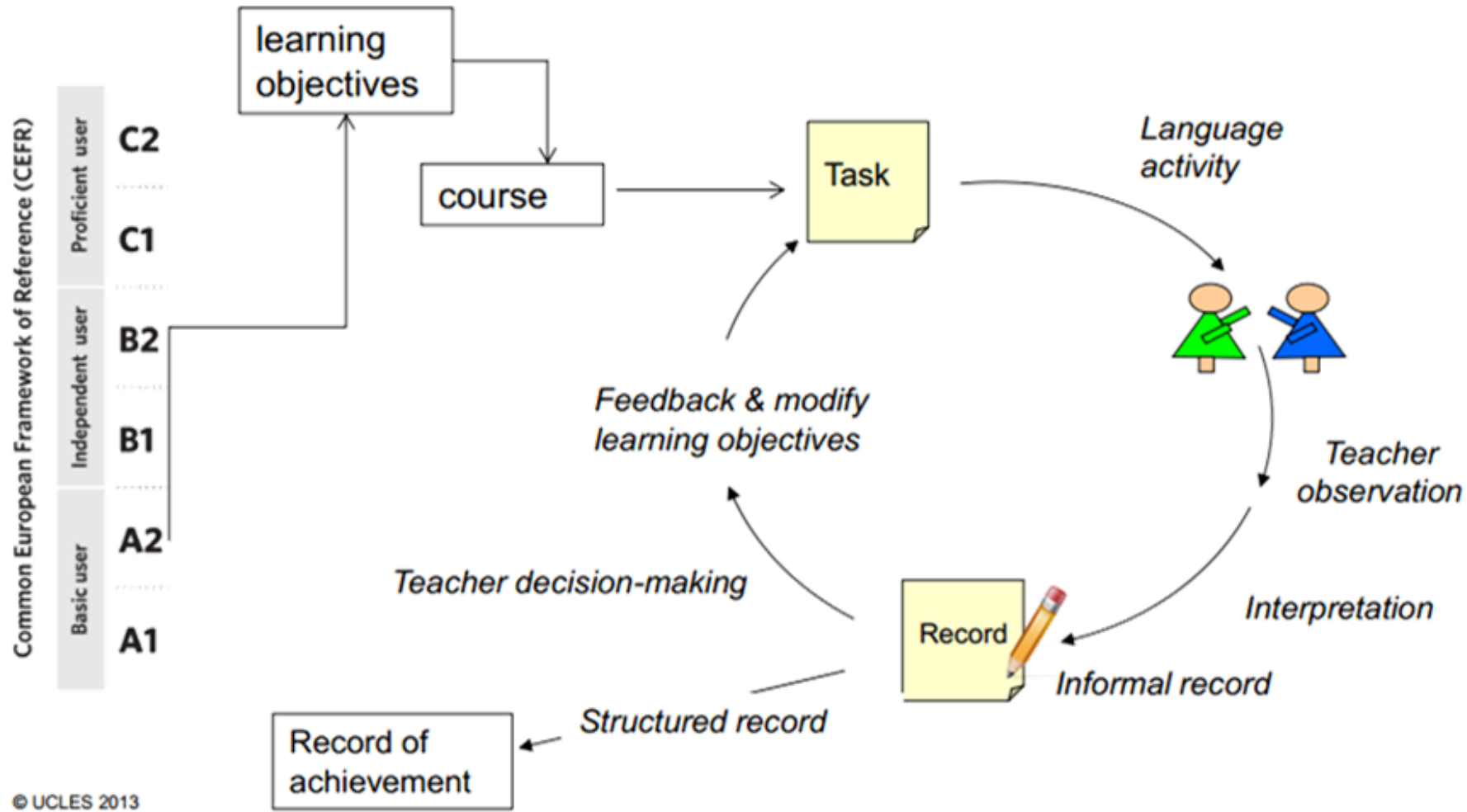
Investigating Cambridge English: First Speaking

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- Cambridge English Language Assessment has a history of aiming to bring together assessment and learning (see, e.g., Jones 2013 Dubai). However, in looking at this relationship, Cambridge English Language Assessment has usually started from the perspective of assessment *of* learning, e.g., Jones, Hamilton & Saville (ILTA/AAAL 2013): "The renewed engagement with education creates pressure to change the relationship between educational assessment and the process of learning and teaching."

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The Speaking Test

Investigating interaction in Cambridge First Speaking Tests

Looking for the language + learning orientation in recorded speaking test events

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- We began with the three key elements of **assessment that is learning oriented** identified by Black & Wiliam (1998) and Carless et al (2007):

  - **learning tasks**

  - **student involvement in self and peer evaluation**

  - **feedback as feed-forward**

- The emphases on **questioning** and **scaffolding** also come from the work of Black and colleagues, and from recent work in Vygotskyan theory and dynamic assessment, as well as decades of classroom observation research reporting

Finding opportunities

- On a first pass through the video data, we did not find any evidence of these things actually happening.

- At this point we began to theorise *why* we were not seeing what we hoped to see: as we looked more closely, it was increasingly borne in on us that the possibilities for a learning orientation are in the hands of the exam interlocutor.

- We thus needed to identify features of language learning-oriented behaviour. We therefore carried out detailed study of the video recordings and identified 7 behaviours that by their presence or absence could facilitate or inhibit the quality, quantity and kind of speaking the examinees produced.

- **The aspects of interlocutor behaviour we looked at are**:

  - body language

  - topic maintenance and management

  - intonation, pacing, pausing

  - clarification strategies (or absence of)

  - error correction or repair

  - management of turn-taking in paired section

  - elicitation of candidate-candidate interaction

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- **Opening the first Task—Interview**

Interlocutor (I): (eyes down) **First of all** (makes eye contact towards both candidates) **we'd like to know something about you, so I'm** (eyes down) **going to ask you** (glances up) **some questions** (eyes down) **about yourselves** (3 sec pause/silence, eyes still down) … (looking up) **where are** (looking at S1) **you from ..** **(name)?**

Interactivity and speaking test TASKS

Interlocutor (I): (eyes down) First of all (makes eye contact towards both candidates) we'd like to know something about you, so I'm (eyes down) going to ask you (glances up) some questions (eyes down) about yourselves (3 sec pause/silence, eyes still down)… (looking up) where are (looking at S1) you from .. (name)?

- We take our first impressions of people and contexts from **body language.** Here:

- Eye contact is problematic

- Pausing may be misleading, or cause nervousness, especially as the I does not nominate the speaker until the last moment

Interactivity and opportunities for learner engagement

- Topic maintenance and shift in the Interview:

S1: I like my Korean food and (0.50-1.03--very hard to understand pronunciation: looks like S2 is not understanding S1)

[*During this 13 second turn there is no clarification request, request for repetition, or error correction, from I*]

I: (smiles) ʻ**kay** (draws breath creating a pause: renews eye contact) **Do you come from a large or small family?**

Interactivity and opportunities for learner engagement

- Topic maintenance and shift in the first Task:

S1: I like my Korean food and (0.50-1.03--very hard to understand pronunciation: looks like S2 is not understanding)

[*During this 13 second turn there is no clarification request, request for repetition, or error correction, from I*]

I: (smiles) ʻ**kay** (draws breath creating a pause: renews eye contact) **Do you come from a large or small family?**

Unannounced topic shifts are hard for NS to follow; more so and also demotivating for NNS in exam conditions

The opportunity for **scaffolding**, or for **asking a clarification question**, is missed.

The individual long turn

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The examiner gives you a pair of photographs to talk about and you have to speak for 1 minute without interruption. As a reminder, the questions you have to answer about your photographs are written at the top of the page. When you have finished speaking, your partner has to answer a short question from the examiner about your photographs.

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The individual long turn

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- One candidate is asked to answer questions about a photo while the other listens; this may create an appearance of interaction but no interaction was observed.

- There were no requests for clarification and no error repair.

- NB: This photo was downloaded from the Cambridge English Language Assessment webpage on Cambridge English: First

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Language learning opportunities in the Individual long turn?

- In terms of the principles of LOLA we would suggest that the Long Turn is a structure with the potential for the Interlocutor to scaffold, reformulate or narrow the task to provide each candidate with enough grounding to get started on the intended task.

- Could this Task-type be moved from Task 2/Part 2 to Part 3? That should give the Interlocutor enough time to form a broad judgement of the general speaking proficiency of each candidate, in order to shape the task appropriately.

LOLA and Part 3- Collaborative Task

The task is to **choose from a selection of pictures of holidays, and discuss**: which ones would be best?

S2:   So "C", what do you think about we visit Europe by train?

S1:   By train? Um.. it's a good... it's a good transport, train.. because it's quite safe.. you don't have to take care where you are going… and you are very quickly from one city to the other one… and you can (mumbles)…

S1:   [yeah…

S2:   [… different cities

S1:   (loudly) … and you can go with your friends

S2:   yes, yes

S1:   and I think for young people you have (hand movement) very.. cheap prices… to go by train around Europe

S2:   yes, yes

S1:   mm hmm

S2:   … and very safe

S1:   yeah

LOLA and Part 3- Collaborative Task

- This was a quite natural interaction between 2 North European males (in their 20s, it seemed) both of whom were performing at or above the level of Cambridge First.

- In the next extract, 2 Greek, younger test takers have clearly been fully prepared for this task type. Shown the pictures, they begin to speak instantly and use a lot of formulaic sequences.

LOLA and Part 3-Collaborative Task

S1:   "Ye-es… I agree with you (flat)… but then um.. I think this job (points) would be quite interesting and er nice to hear about and er.. to have it (downtone).

S2: er.. I disagree with you (flat) because if you do that job for many… er … for long time, at last you 'll be bored I think (flat)

S1: (flat) Ye,,es.. -and you will (slightly lifts the tone and speeds delivery) be fat also. (M looks at her and laughs: she has not looked up, but smiles when she hears his chuckle)

The two students haven't looked at each other until S1 (female) says "and you will be fat". Has she suddenly 'engaged her brain' with what she is doing?

How can we tune candidates in to the importance of interaction before they are buried under the weight of exam-itis?

Self-directed or undirected interaction?

- In terms of **management of turn-taking**

  - in Parts 3 and 4 this is all done by the candidates themselves, and in most cases it seems to result in stilted turn exchanges.

- In terms of **elicitation of candidate-candidate interaction**

  - again, in Parts 3 and 4 this is all done by candidates themselves.

- Could the Interlocutor take on a peer role in Part 4 Discussion?

- To introduce a 'third voice' if the Interlocutor isn't going to interact, the Discussion could be delivered on a computer screen in the exam room, creating a locus of engagement for the candidates.

The critical addition of **interactivity**➲ learning-oriented **language** assessment

Learning-oriented assessment	Test preparation practices
Tasks designed to stimulate effective learning	Tasks limited to those mirroring the test
Learners **active**	Learners passive
Learners engage in self- and peer-evaluation	Learners take practice tests - receive scores
Focus on feedback	Feedback beyond scores is rare
Strategic use of **questioning**	Teacher-delivered information
Scaffolded performance	Solo performance
UPTAKE of feedback	Learners may choose to take up feedback: unsystematic
Learning-oriented language assessment is inherently interactive	Large-scale testing inevitably under-represents the constructs of language

A key implication

- In concluding our report on this study we argued that for effective LOLA to occur in large-scale speaking tests, more extensive observation and analysis of interlocutor language behaviours is needed to determine which of these is more critical, when, and why; **and also**, relatedly, fully scaffolded training of interlocutors for the interlocutor role is critical.

- This suggests that there is a need for:

  - Interlocutor training materials development

  - trainer training for lead speaking examiners

  - ongoing observations of interlocutor skills implementation

  - refresher training for interlocutors on a periodic basis

Next Steps

In a further study we plan to

- explore how teachers prepare for Cambridge Speaking tests and how they integrate Cambridge test tasks into their teaching practices. We will make use of the framework for Learning Oriented Language Assessment (LOLA) developed in the this study. We will analyse classes and interviews with teachers using data from the *Progetto Lingue Impact Study.*