

Interaction Competence of EFL students with different proficiency

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Communication and interactional competence are crucial to language acquisition. There are many proficiency tests and exams to evaluate language learners' English proficiency by task formats like reading comprehension, listening, writing, and speaking. In terms of speaking assessment, they often use formats like interviews, role-play, or group discussions to assess learners' interactional competence. However, it's argued that these oral assessments cannot display learners' interactional competence in real-life situations. They can only show the learners' performance in a particular genre (i.e. exam environment). In this study, conversation analysis (CA) was employed to examine two groups of higher-intermediate to advanced-level university undergraduate students in Hong Kong. The main aim of this study is to see if the group discussion by the higher-proficiency group resembles a natural conversation more than the lower-proficiency group in the speaking assessment context. It was found that, in terms of speaker selection, turn orders, truthfulness, etc., I noticed that the group discussion was not natural when compared to a natural conversation in the lower-proficiency group. Although the higher-proficiency group performed better, it was still not like a natural conversation. This study gives teachers and test designers insights into how to design an appropriate test and reveals the importance of engaging language learners in authentic conversations in language classrooms.

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