

Individual Paper Session 12
Testing
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Intra-task comparison in monologic test of speaking: aspects of linguistic analysis

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‘Monologue (individual long turn)’ is advocated as an ideal elicitation task for assessing speaking ability in low and high stakes testing. Its practical advantages are that it can be delivered in a variety of formats, e.g. live or recorded. Moreover, as a single speaker produces a long turn without interacting with other speakers, it does not suffer from the contaminating effect of the co-construction of discourse, seen by McNamara as potentially resulting in construct irrelevant variance. To date, there has been relatively little research exists on what contributes to the degree of task difficulty within monologic tasks in a speaking test.

The paper explores how EFL learners’ performance on a monologic speaking task could be affected by deliberately manipulating tasks, in terms of planning time, the amount of support, and response time. Four retired IELTS speaking tasks, which were demonstrated in the first phase to be equivalent from a quantitative and qualitative perspective, were first manipulated and then given to 120 EFL participants. The resulting performances were analyzed using candidates’ scores for their performance, results from a cognitive processing behaviour questionnaire (in pre-planning, in planning and during speaking stage), and through a linguistic analysis of the resulting spoken texts.

The results show how manipulated tasks significantly impacted on the scores and the cognitive processing while planning, as well as on the language generated. These contribute to our understanding of how task performance could be more accurately predicted and assessed.