

Chapter 8

***Interact* and Higher Proficiency Students: Concluding Perspectives**

8.1 Introduction

- In Ch. 7, the interviews with teachers presented several issues for the successful operationalization of *interact* at the highest level of NCEA.
 - ⇒ **Task type, Spontaneity and lack of rehearsal, Grammar**
- Task type
 - … It is crucial for students to *interact* successfully. Teachers have willingness to develop the more pedestrian topics and try out other topics.
- Spontaneity and lack of rehearsal
 - … There was a range of understandings and practices.
- Grammar
 - … Accounting for language that was at students' curriculum level or encouraging language that was appropriate to the task?
- This chapter concludes the presentation of data from study in to *interact*.
 - (1) The issues of washback from the perspective of the teachers
 - (2) The final word from students

8.2 Working for Washback

○ **The positive washback** implication of *interact*

- Jane explained that there was a need to “really try and get the interaction going all year.” To achieve this, “you just need to really make sure that it’s happening in the whole culture of your classroom.”
- The positive washback of interaction would result in classroom environment that would encourage spontaneous and unrehearsed interaction (for assessment purposes) among students.
 - James introduced *interact* at NCEA level 3 and concluded that the interaction “really worth doing”, finding weak students really perform.
 - Alison described one interaction (skype conversation between one of her students and a friend in Japan) as “completely spontaneous, lovely, the most authentic conversation.”
 - Celia: “often by changing the assessment is the way that we change the teaching practice.”

○ **The negative washback**

- The assessment will become a point of focus
- ⇒ a more structured and controlled teaching and learning environment, lack of spontaneity, pre-rehearsal, memorization...

- *Interact* could increase confidence in encouraging spontaneity and, on the other, still depend on prior rehearsal.
 - Jane’s experience indicated that the scripting and preparation hindered evidence of genuine interaction.
- ⇒ Monika’s experience implied a gradual improvement and pre-scripting become less prevalent over the past 3 years.
Teachers understand how to prepare their students for peer interact and the quantity of interaction had risen.

8.3 The Students Surveys

- Pilot survey (n = 30): Year 13 students at the highest level. Those who were among the last to take *converse*.
- The main survey (n = 119): Year 13 students at the highest level. Those who were among the first to take *interact*.

8.3.1 Section I

Table 8.1 Overall means and differences in means (students): *converse* and *interact*

Measure		<i>Converse</i> (n=30)	<i>Interact</i> (n=118) ^a	Difference in mean
Perceived validity and reliability				
1. Helped me to show clearly what I know and can do when speaking the language	M	6.66	6.58	-0.08
	SD	2.00	1.9	
2. Helped to provide an accurate measure of my speaking ability	M	6.28	6.42	0.14
	SD	2.54	2.14	
3. Gave me the opportunity to show my fluency in speaking the language	M	6.22	6.52	0.3
	SD	2.11	1.88	
Perceived authenticity and interactivity				
4. Gave me the opportunity to have a genuine conversation with another person	M	6.5	6.06	-0.44
	SD	1.62	2.14	
5. Gave me the opportunity to use real and unrehearsed language	M	6.14	6.22	0.08
	SD	2.2	1.98	
6. Provided a good measure of the language I may need to use when talking with native speakers in the future	M	6.1	6.04	-0.06
	SD	2.4	2.24	
Perceived impact				
7. Completing the assessment made me feel anxious and stressed	M	5.6	5.62	0.02
	SD	3.12	2.88	
8. I enjoyed the opportunity to speak that the assessment gave me	M	5.98	5.8	-0.18
	SD	2.62	2.36	

0: Strongly disagree
~
10: Strongly agree

- The means ranged from -0.44 to +0.3, and none of these differences was significant.
 - Both assessments replicated a spoken communicative proficiency construct well, and provided good opportunity for students to display their ability (Measure 1 ~ 6, 8).
 - Both groups perceived the assessments to be stressful (Measure 7).
- ⇒ Neither assessments was better or worse in terms of perceived usefulness and fitness for purpose.

8.3.2 Taking a Closer Look at the Numbers

- The variability was most pronounced in the level of stress generated by the assessment (Measure 7).
- ⇒ *Interact* seemed to generate less stress overall (the difference is not significant).

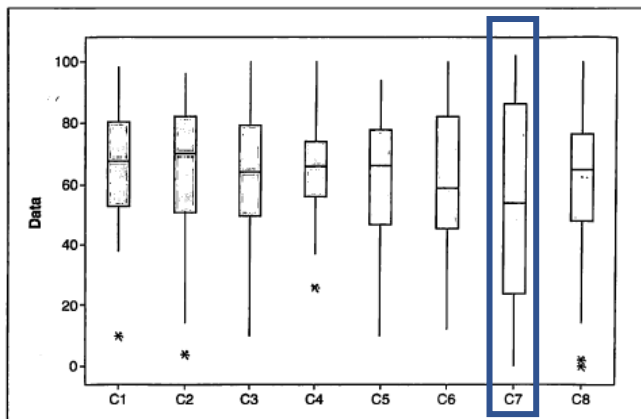


Fig. 8.2 Converse – range of responses by measure

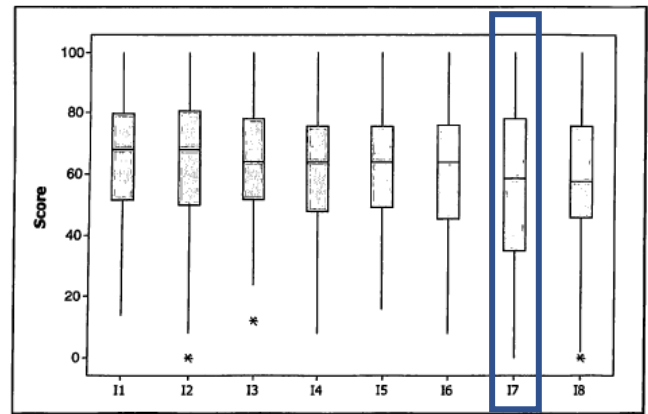


Fig. 8.3 Interact – range of responses by measure

- Neither assessment was viewed as being adequate as a measure of communicative proficiency.

8.4 Students Survey Response – Converse

- The essential limitations of the *converse*

⇒ the propensity to rote-learn responses and the tendency to force artificial language into use

- “... writing it out beforehand ensures you can include good vocabulary and grammar”
- The conversations were effectively “rehearsed and learned learnt off by heart” and performed “as it was written”
- *Converse* would work better if it were “less structured in its delivery so it flows like a conversation”, or “more freely spoken”.
- There should be more focus on fluency than on accuracy.
 - “... the necessity to include structures increased pressure and anxiety as well as reduced fluency”.
 - The conversation should mark be marked on “how conversational it is” and on “how you keep the conversation going”.
- A summative conversation as an assessment was a factor to its ‘unnaturalness’ and made students feel nervous.
 - “Maybe the conversation standard should focus on being more natural ... it should be more about if you are able to adapt to a typical conversation.”
- An improvement might be to include “more opportunities to do conversations as opposed to marks being decided from one conversation”.
- Teachers could provide more opportunities to practice, and the assessment could “allow students to converse with other students as they might feel comfortable and would perform better.”

○Discussion point

In the students’ survey response, many of them referred to lack of opportunities to do conversation and to evaluate their fluency. What kind of task type do you think is better to meet students’ need?