

Academic speaking skills in a digital age: How can we assess them?

Nakatsuhara, Fumiyo

Centre for Research in English Language Learning and Assessment,

University of Bedfordshire, UK.

Abstract

The use of digital technology in academic and educational contexts has been tremendously accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, when learners globally started relying on digital technologies to attend online classes and take online examinations from home. Focusing on online communication mediated through video-conferencing, this talk discusses how new technologies can be harnessed to successfully deliver video-conferencing speaking tests and the extent to which such tests can tap into the emerging construct of speaking through online communication.

The first part of the talk will present a 3-phase mixed-methods study which involved a total of 220 test-takers and 22 examiners in the UK, China and four Latin American countries, to investigate the equivalence of the construct in face-to-face and video-conferencing delivery modes of the IELTS Speaking test (Nakatsuhara et al., 2017; 2021). The project focused on the comparability of test scores and elicited language functions, as well as examiners' test administration and rating behaviours across the two delivery modes. The second part will then report on another study that explored language functions and skills utilised in online academic speaking contexts (Nakatsuhara et al., 2021). The research involved: a) language function analysis of online spoken communication in 17 lectures and 23 research supervision meetings in Australian and UK universities and b) thematic analysis of students' and lecturers' self-reports on distinctive features of online academic speaking. This presentation will conclude with a discussion of how video-conferencing speaking tests can best reflect digitally-mediated communication in academic settings.

References

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Fumiyo Nakatsuhara

Fumiyo Nakatsuhara is Reader in Language Assessment at the Centre for Research in English Language Learning and Assessment (CRELLA), University of Bedfordshire, UK. Her main research interests include the nature of co-constructed interaction in speaking tests, task design, rating scale development, and the relationship between listening and speaking skills.

Fumiyo.nakatsuhara@beds.ac.uk