Speaking Skills
in the Academic Context

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Foreword

The purposes of this book are to introduce an English learners' corpus – The English Speech Corpus with Different Proficiency Levels and guide learners how to use the corpus to improve spoken English.

Since there are a number of established and recognized English language tests worldwide, such as TOEFL, IELTS and Cambridge English Qualifications, after reviewing the marking scheme of the tests, this book has taken IELTS as the example to demonstrate skills and strategies for handling the academic speaking test.

Chapter 1 will introduce the test format and marking criteria of the academic speaking test, as well as the corpus and learning website developed for learners and teachers on improving English speaking proficiency. Chapter 2 to Chapter 5 will be devoted on the explanations of each marking criteria, namely **Fluency and Coherence (FC), Lexical Resource (LR), Grammatical Range and Accuracy (GA), and Pronunciation (PN)** respectively. Positive features and ways to avoid common mistakes will be introduced. Corpus-based activities are available along with the features and mistakes to enhance learners' experience. At the end of each chapter, *Teaching Corner* is provided for those who would like to teach the skills in their future career.

Chapter 1: Introduction to Academic Speaking test and the corpus

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

➢ Understand the format and marking criteria of the IELTS speaking test

➢ Improve your speaking with the resources on the learning website

➢ Use the 'Browse' and 'Search' functions of the corpus

In this chapter, we will start by introducing the format and marking criteria of the speaking part of an internationally recognized English Language Test, IELTS. Then, resources available on the learning website, such as a question bank and mini quizzes, will be presented. Finally, you will learn how to use the 'Browse' and 'Search' functions of the corpus.

Part I. About the IELTS speaking test
(All contents below are retrieved from: https://www.ielts.org/for-test-takers/test-format)

A. Test format

The IELTS speaking test is an oral interview between the test-takers and an examiner, and usually lasts for **11–14 minutes**. There are three parts, and the test assesses candidates' use of spoken English. Every test is recorded.

Part 1 – Introduction and Interview

Timing: 4 – 5 minutes

Focus: to test test-takers' ability to **communicate opinions and information** on everyday topics and common experiences or situations

Task type: The examiner asks general questions about test-takers themselves and a range of familiar topics, such as home, family, work, studies and interests.

Part 2 – Long Turn

Timing: 3–4 minutes (including one-minute preparation time)

Focus: to test test-takers' ability to **speak at length on a given topic** (without further prompts from the examiner), using appropriate language and organising ideas coherently

Task type: The examiner gives the test-takers a task card which asks the test-takers to talk about a particular topic, includes points to cover in their talk and instructs the test-takers to explain one aspect of the topic. Test-takers are given one minute to prepare their talk, and are given a pencil and paper to make notes. The examiner asks the test-takers to talk for 1 to 2 minutes, stops the test-takers after 2 minutes, and asks one or two questions on the same topic.

Part 3 – Discussion

Timing: 4 – 5 minutes

Focus: to test the ability to **express and justify opinions and to analyse, discuss and speculate** about issues

Task type: Test-takers will be asked further questions about the topic in Part 2. These will give test-takers the opportunity to discuss more abstract ideas and issues in greater depth.

B. *Marking Criteria*

Test-takers' speaking performances are assessed by certificated IELTS examiners based on the official performance descriptors which describe spoken performance at the nine IELTS bands. Four sub-skills are examined, namely **Fluency and Coherence (FC), Lexical Resource (LR), Grammatical Range and Accuracy (GA), and Pronunciation (PN)**.

Fluency and Coherence (FC)

Fluency and Coherence in IELTS speaking test refers to the ability to talk with normal levels of continuity, rate and effort and to link ideas and language together to form coherent, connected speech. The key indicators involved are appropriate speech rate, appropriate speech continuity, logical sequencing of sentences, clear marking of stages in a discussion, narration or argument, and the proper use of cohesive devices (e.g., connectors, pronouns and conjunctions) within and between sentences.

Key indicators used for determining speakers' performance in FC include Repetition, Self-correction, Discourse markers and Connectives, Speech length, Speech rate, and the number and duration of filled pause, silent pause and silent pause at the end of a phrase, a clause or a sentence.

Lexical Resource (LR)

In this part, the range of vocabulary used and the precision with which meanings and attitudes can be expressed are evaluated. Several key indicators are involved, such as the variety of words used, the adequacy and appropriacy of the words used and the ability to circumlocute (get round a vocabulary gap by using other words) with or without noticeable hesitation.

Key indicators used for determining speakers' performance in LR include less common words, paraphrase, idiomatic expressions as well as appropriate collocations and word choice.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy (GA)

Grammatical Range and Accuracy in IELTS speaking test refers to the range and the accurate and appropriate use of the test takers' grammatical resource. The key indicators involved are the length and complexity of the spoken sentences, the appropriate use of subordinate clauses, and the range of sentence structures, especially to move elements around for information focus, the number of grammatical errors in a given amount of speech, and the communicative effect of error.

Key indicators used for determining speakers' performance in GA include grammatical errors, and the use of sentence structures such as coordinate clause, adverbial clause, relative clause, noun clause and inversion.

In this part, the ability to produce comprehensible speech to fulfil the Speaking test requirements is examined. Several key indicators are involved, such as the amount of strain caused to the listener, the amount of the speech which is unintelligible, and the noticeability of L1 influence.

Key indicators used for determining speakers' performance in PN include consonants and vowels features, mispronunciation, the use of consonant-vowel linking, as well as appropriate intonation, word stress and rhythm.

> ### *What is a 'corpus'? How can it help my language learning?*
>
> A corpus is "a large, principled collection of naturally occurring texts (written or spoken) stored electronically" (Reppen, 2010, p.2). There are many types of corpora complied worldwide. Some of them contain language data from native speakers, such as British National Corpus (BNC), while some of them contain data from learners, such as The English Speech Corpus with Different Proficiency Levels introduced in this book.
>
> By analysing the authentic data produced by other language learners, you can identify the common errors and positive features more easily and thus be aware of the mistakes that you may also have produced throughout the learning.

Part II. The corpus

A. About the corpus

The English Speech Corpus with Different Proficiency Levels aims to provide learners, teachers and researchers with high-quality authentic recordings from practice tests and detailed annotations of linguistic features of learners with different English proficiency levels. The corpus contains 72 sets of data from free speeches. Of the 72 sets of data, 42 are collected from Chinese Mainland and Hong Kong learners, and 30 are retrieved from IELTS speaking official videos.

There is currently over 300 minutes of recording data with linguistic annotations that focus on four aspects (i.e., Fluency and Coherence, Lexical Resource, Grammatical Range and Accuracy, and Pronunciation) according to the IELTS speaking criteria, which can help Chinese English learners identify difficulties in English speaking learning. The high-quality recordings are ideally suited for learners, teachers, and researchers in the Greater China.

To find a recording of a practice test or a video of the IELTS speaking test sample, you can use either the "Browse" or "Search" function. This site is fully searchable, not just by browsing speakers' biographic information, like the gender, the age, the IELTS Speaking score they achieved and the IELTS speaking session they took; you can also use the "Search" function to search the recording samples by selecting the linguistic features you are interested in.

All the annotations that have been added for the current recordings are solely our suggestions. We do not claim that these are 100% accurate or the only way the speech can be analysed. All raw recordings and transcripts are open for download.

B. How to use the 'Browse' function?

Having entered the corpus page, you will be directed to the 'Browse' page where you can use the 'Browse' function.

There are two ways for you to get into the data page where we put the transcripts and annotations of the speakers' performance.

1. Direct browsing

The 'Browse' page has shown all data pages of each speaker. They are categorized based on the speaking score (i.e., from 5.0 to 9.0) and speaking session (i.e., Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3). Each speaker contains 4 data pages, namely FC, LR, GA and PN. These 4 pages are in line with the marking criteria of the speaking test.

You can simply click on the FC/LR/GA/PN page under each speaker according to the band score and session you want to look at. A plain transcript will be shown after the click. Below is an example from the FC page of speaker 1, who scored 5.0 in the test. On the left of the transcript, you can find an info box containing details about the speaker (e.g., gender, IELTS Speaking Score) and the transcript (i.e., IELTS Speaking Session). On the transcript, audio segments are available after each question and response.

If you want to read the annotations, simply scroll down to look for the feature list:

Select the feature(s) that you want to learn, the annotations will be automatically displayed in the transcript. You can also select **All** to enable all annotations, or **None** to disable all annotations. When you browse the data page of speakers with high band scores (i.e., 8.0 or above), at the bottom of the transcript, there is a link to another page showing a combined version of annotation. The annotations on Fluency and Coherence and Pronunciation will be combined, while annotations of Lexical Resource and Grammatical Range and Accuracy will be combined.

At the end of the data page, there is also a PDF file summarizing the annotated features. The PDF file also provides general comments and some suggested corrections. Details provided for each marking criteria are as follow:

Marking criteria	Details
Fluency and Coherence	• The occurrence of repetition, self-correction, discourse markers & connectives, pausing • Speech length, speech rate • Duration and occurrence of filled pausing, silent pausing, and silent pausing – E
Lexical Resource	• The occurrence of appropriate less common words, idiomatic expressions, paraphrase and collocations • Suggested corrections for inappropriate collocations and word choices • Distribution of words according to BNC-COCA type list
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	• General comments on the use of sentence structures and grammatical errors • Suggested corrections for grammatical errors

Pronunciation	• The occurrence of segmental features, including consonants and vowels
	• General comments on suprasegmental features, including intonation, stress, linking and rhythm

You can also download this file for future reference.

2. Browse with filter

Instead of manually scrolling the 'Browse' page, you can look for the desired pages by applying filters such as gender, age, IELTS speaking score and speaking session.

C. How to use the 'Search' function?

Apart from the 'Browse' page, the corpus also comes with a 'Search' function.

This search engine is very straight-forward. All you need to do is select the **Band** (i.e., from 5.0 to 9.0) and **Category** (i.e., the four marking criteria). Then, the engine will show the feature list of the selected category in **Step 1** for you to choose. You can also select NONE SELECTION as the choice to show results containing all features.

If the feature that you have chosen contains sub-category, you can further refine the search result in **Step 2**.

All search results will be displayed with the same presentation style as shown in 'Browse' page. The only difference is that when you enter a particular data page, the feature that you have chosen in the 'Search' page will be displayed on the transcript. Therefore, you don't need to scroll down and select the feature from the feature list.

Fluency & Coherence

Speaker : 12
Gender : Female
IELTS Speaking Score : 5.5
IELTS Speaking Session: Part 1

E-examiner **S**-student

E: OK. So, so do you work or are you a student? ▶ 0:00 / 0:07 ◀)) ⋮

S: I'm a student from a university. ▶ 0:00 / 0:04 ◀)) ⋮

E: Oh, what do you study? ▶ 0:00 / 0:03 ◀)) ⋮

S: My major is media and communication. ▶ 0:00 / 0:04 ◀)) ⋮

E: Why did you choose to study this subject? ▶ 0:00 / 0:04 ◀)) ⋮

S: Because I love this major and s, since I am **(SP)** child, I **(SP)** , I love to communicat,
(0.10s) **(0.29s)**
communication with my friend and my family. So, I choose this major.

▶ 0:00 / 0:16 ◀)) ⋮

E: Now let's move on to talk about picnics. Did you go on picnics when you were a child?

▶ 0:00 / 0:06 ◀)) ⋮

Annotated transcripts

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D. How to cite the corpus?

If you want to cite this corpus in your assignments / dissertations / teaching materials, please use the following information: (citation style: APA 7th edition)

Chen, H.C. (2022). *The English Speech Corpus with different proficiency levels. The Education University of Hong Kong*. Retrieved from https://lml-learning.eduhk.hk/englishspeechcorpus/index.aspx.

Part III. Learning website

In the learning website (accessible here), you can find the access to the corpus, recordings of classroom presentation and various resources for learners and teachers.

In **Classroom Presentation** page, you will find authentic recordings from students of different English proficiency levels (i.e., IELTS speaking 5, 5.5, 6, 6.5, 7, and 7.5) who have delivered speeches on topics related to **Life Education**, such as *A time you feel satisfied with Life*, *A time you dealt with stress*, etc. Evaluation forms are provided in the Activity session of the **For Learners** page.
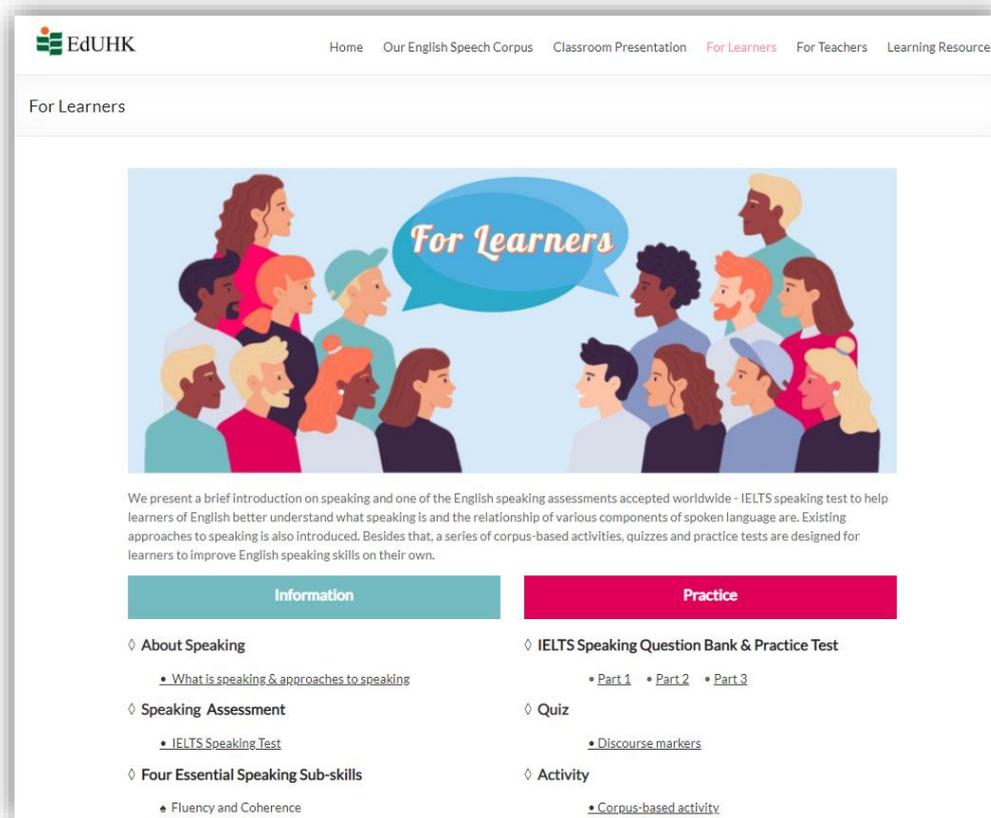
In the **For Learners** page, there are information on the four marking criteria of the speaking test, as well as different forms of practice including question bank and quizzes. **Corpus-based activities** and evaluation forms of **classroom presentation** are available. For the classroom presentation session, after listening to the presentations in the **Classroom Presentation** page, you can evaluate their performance with forms and indicators provided.

In the **For Teachers** page, you can find the Corpus-aided Teaching Training Programme with materials and video clips open for free access.

Finally, references and other online resources are listed in the **Learning Resources** page. Useful websites are identified and categorised based on the four marking criteria for your further self-learning.

Learning Resources

Fluency and Coherence

• Discourse marker list

https://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/discourse-markers-so-right-okay

Lexis

• Online Collocation Dictionary

https://www.freecollocation.com/

https://ozdic.com/

https://www.macmillandictionary.com/browse/collocations/british/a/

• Online Idiom Dictionary

https://www.theidioms.com/

Grammar

Pronunciation

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https://corpus.eduhk.hk/english_speech_corpus/