Title page

Article title:

Gatekeeping and Linguistic Capital: A case study of the Cambridge University Undergraduate Admissions Interview

Author name and affiliation:

Dr. Daniel Weston
School of English
Faculty of Arts
University of Hong Kong

Postal address & email address

Dr. Daniel Weston
Room 7:50
Run Run Shaw Tower
Centennial Campus
University of Hong Kong
Hong Kong

dweston@hku.hk

Funding

The work described in this paper was fully supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China, Project No. HKU17611920.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the University of Cambridge for its forward-thinking and generous collaboration on this project. The author also wishes to thank Louise Tranekjær for her helpful review and constructive comments on this article. Thanks also to Gøril Thomassen and Srikant Sarangi for comments on earlier drafts. Any errors that remain are my own.

Abstract

The Cambridge University Admissions Interview is a gatekeeping encounter in which academic staff members question, and evaluate, prospective undergraduates on the subject they have applied to study. It is politically controversial as admittance to Cambridge brings unparalleled educational and professional advantages, yet privately-educated candidates are disproportionately successful, and thus appear to have greater "linguistic capital" at interview, when compared with their state-educated peers. Using the techniques of interactional sociolinguistics, the following paper details the shifting interactional requirements of six admissions interviews in English Literature. It finds that a successful interview performance is, in fact, determined by a candidate's ability to manage the (sometimes opposed) requirements of being both a responsive student and a convincing peer academic. Such requirements are shown to cut across, and problematize, the direct relationship perceived to exist between socio-educational background, linguistic capital and success at interview. The results from this study are used both to draw out the differences between the admissions interview and other types of interview setting, as well as to suggest research pathways for research.

Keywords: gatekeeping, interviews, University of Cambridge, undergraduate admissions, interactional sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

Gatekeeping, in its figurative sense, refers to situations in which an institutional representative first evaluates, then approves or rejects, the claims of a person seeking either a new social or professional status, or access to specific resources. A job interview is the prototypical example of such an encounter (Adelswärd 1988; Akinnaso & Seabrook Ajirotutu 1982; Kerekes 2006; Roberts 2001, 2013; Roberts and Campbell 2006; Scheuer 2001), though other studies have explored academic counselling sessions (Erickson and Shultz 1982); internship interviews (Tranekjær 2015); permanent residency assessments (Johnston 2008); and psychiatric evaluations of patients seeking gender reassignment (Speer and Parsons 2006) etc. Erickson (2011) outlines the main characteristics of such encounters. First, they have life-long consequences for the individuals under evaluation, either in terms of their social or professional standing, or, in clinical contexts, potentially their life chances. Second, in such encounters, effective self-presentation is vital to an individual's success in achieving his/her goals.

The undergraduate admissions interview (CUI) at the University of Cambridge is a gatekeeping encounter par excellence. All students seeking admission to the University must attend two or more such interviews in which they are asked questions on their intended field of study by academic staff members, who function as institutional gatekeepers in those instances. While such a practice is unusual in higher education, it is not unique, and can be found in other elite British institutions, such as the University of Oxford, Imperial College, and University College London, amongst others. (Gatekeeping interviews are also sometimes used by other universities for admission to specific courses, such as medicine, pharmacology or drama.) Applicants who gain admittance to these universities enjoy unparalleled chances of well-paid employment upon graduation (De Vries 2014: 5), not to mention the social recognition accorded to alumni of globally prestigious universities. The decisive role that the admissions interview plays in undergraduate selection thus makes it a "high stakes" encounter.

Given the educational and professional advantages of attending Cambridge, it is unsurprising that the admissions process has generated significant public concern,

particularly as the University admits a disproportionate number of middle-class, privately educated candidates relative to the British public as a whole (University of Cambridge Application Statistics). In the public imagination, candidates with this profile are believed to outperform their state-educated peers at interview as a result of the rhetorical dash and cavalier self-confidence they are assumed acquire at school. Scholars within Educational Sociology have long sought to determine the accuracy of these assumptions, though their attempts to gain access to the admissions interview have met with limited success. In their statistical account of the University of Oxford admittance policy, Zimdars et al. (2009: 652) state that interview access "would provide a rich and complementary source of further insights into the ways in which certain groups of students are advantaged or disadvantaged in the competition for a place, producing the patterns of admission which we analyse here". Zimdars (2010: 320) subsequently extends this line of thinking by appealing specifically for the application of discourse-analytical methods to understand how "embodied aspects of social-background characteristics, such as physical appearance and demeanour, confidence and speech styles, play out during the selection procedure".

This study is, in part, a preliminary response to that appeal. Following a lengthy process of negotiation and trust-building with the University of Cambridge, permission was given for a series of interviews to be audio-recorded, collated, transcribed, and analysed from a discourse analytical perspective. The provision of this corpus – here called the Cambridge University Interview (CUI) corpus – presents a unique opportunity to investigate the issues of social justice outlined above. However, in order to do this effectively, systematic analysis must first establish what the interactional requirements of the admissions interview are. Roberts and Sarangi (1999: 477-478) make a similar point in their analysis of oral examinations for the Royal College of General Practitioners, namely that "the potential for discrimination…depend[s] on understanding the talk processes themselves".

Drawing on Bourdieu (1991), this paper therefore addresses itself to a central question: what is the "linguistic capital" required for a successful Cambridge undergraduate interview performance? For Bourdieu, "linguistic capital" – the lingual analogue of cultural capital – refers to the mastery of a single formal register of a standard language variety, typically associated with a society's dominant

socioeconomic class. Although such a register is undoubtedly beneficial in institutional encounters, other scholars have shown that it is only one component of the linguistic abilities required by the interview setting. As “hybrid” communicative events (Gumperz & Hymes 1972, Hymes 1972), interviews require participants to blend formal styles seamlessly with other discourse modes, ranging from the narrative to the personal or dramatic (Roberts and Sarangi 1999, Roberts & Campbell 2006, Roberts 2013). The term “linguistic capital” is therefore used here in a broader, more plural sense, defined by Roberts & Campbell (2006: 14) as “knowledge of how to use particular vocabularies, social positions and modes of behaviour appropriate to the interview setting”. What this entails in relation to the Cambridge admissions interview is the focus of the following analysis.

A key objective will be to demonstrate how interviewers use specific interactional strategies to construct various modes of talk (Roberts and Sarangi 1999), roles (Goffman 1959, 1961, 1974) and role relationships within the admissions interview, and how successfully these are oriented to and performed by candidates (see 3. Analytic Approach and Methodology). We will then touch on the social concerns outlined above, namely how candidates from privileged educational backgrounds manage these requirements. It should be clearly stated that such an analysis remains partial and speculative. With only a small and unrepresentative number of available candidates and interviewers (see 4. Data), this study cannot be used to address concerns that are directed to the University of Cambridge as a whole, which conducts over ten thousand admissions interviews across a wide range of subjects every year. It is also beyond the scope of the present study to evaluate how interviews are weighted against other aspects of a candidate’s application, such as submitted essays or project work. What it can do, however, is to establish a preliminary framework for assessing how educationally privileged students might respond differently to the various interactional requirements of a subject specific interview; explore if/how this interactional behaviour reflects public perceptions and concerns; and determine how research in this area might be taken forward. The following account of the existing scholarship on gatekeeping encounters helps to locate these goals within the broader research literature on gatekeeping.

2. Literature review

Erickson and Shultz (1982: 193) articulate a concern that has shaped much of the research into gatekeeping encounters, namely that they are "rigged, albeit not deliberately, in favor of those individuals whose communication style and social background are most similar to those of the interviewer with whom they talk". In their seminal study of academic counselling sessions, they found that establishing interpersonal solidarity and "co-membership" – defined as the characteristics, backgrounds, interests and experiences that people have in common – is vital for a student's chances of receiving high-quality advice, a fact that ultimately disadvantages students from ethnic-minority backgrounds. Kerekes (2006, 2007) concurs, and shows that candidates who fail to establish co-membership with interviewers in job interviews also experience less lenient treatment when they do not produce the answers expected of them. Indeed, the importance of knowing what the interviewer expects or wishes to hear – variously called the "interview game" (Roberts and Campbell 2006) or the "hidden agenda" (Adelswärd 1988: 77) – is critically important to the interview process, and may often disadvantage working-class candidates who are unaware of its existence, let alone the style of self-presentation that will satisfy it. Similar social concerns permeate the Cambridge admissions interview given the longstanding and well-publicized disparity between the admissions rates for privately- and state-educated applicants (Zimdars et al. 2009, Zimdars 2010).

Although this paper does not focus on the admissions interview as an intercultural event, this theme is nevertheless prevalent in the research literature, and has had a marked influence on how miscommunication during interviews is conceived. The work of John Gumperz (1982, 1992) and Gumperz et al. (1979) is fundamental in this respect. Gumperz describes how implicit forms of discrimination occur when the culturally divergent backgrounds of participants result in "crosstalk" – the misunderstandings and misalignments that arise from different cultural assumptions about how to speak and interact in an interview setting. Such misalignments have been shown to be primarily cultural in nature, rather than due to candidates' linguistic abilities (Erickson and Shultz 1982, Roberts and Campbell 2006, Kirilova 2012). Indeed, Auer (1998), Auer and Kern (2001), and Birkner (2004)

find similar misalignments between West German interviewers and East German job seekers, a salient reminder of how social and ideological differences can manifest themselves in interactions between participants who share the same first language. Tranekjær (2015) deepens our understanding of cultural misalignments in her study of Danish internship interviews. She rightly notes that much of the gatekeeping literature has been methodologically concerned with viewing the implicit bias experienced by marginalized groups through the prism of unequal outcomes (ibid. 54). Her approach is, instead, to demonstrate that the asymmetry of gatekeeping encounters (Drew and Heritage 1992) is apparent in the way that specific membership categories (second-language speaker, Muslim etc.) are actively established – and subordinated – in interaction. In this sense, she shows that gatekeeping encounters merely accentuate the same processes of inclusion and exclusion that occur in any intercultural interaction.

A key feature of Gumperz's influential work on "crosstalk" is that a candidate's cultural background becomes manifest in how they speak through indexical "contextualization cues" (Gumperz 1982). Kerekes's (2007) later study of an American national employment agency finds that other identity markers, such as gender, career background or socioeconomic status, can also be directly linked to a candidate's particular style of speech, and, by extension, their success at interview. Such findings align in many ways with public perceptions of the Cambridge admissions interview, in which a candidate's educational background is assumed to exert a deterministic impact on their communicative behaviour. As Roberts and Campbell (2006) note, however, "many researchers… have been at pains to avoid the kind of essentialist categorisation which would equate one… group with one style of speaking". Sarangi (1994: 412) suggests that one cannot assume that contextualization cues are always cultural in origin, as they may instead reflect the influence of situational and societal structures (see also Shea 1994). Auer and Kern (2001) challenge the idea that individuals can be analytically subsumed into the social background or 'culture' to which they putatively belong.

Such a critique raises questions about where the appropriate emphasis of academic enquiry should lie; with the mismatches between interview participants and their putative speech styles, or with the interactional requirements of the gatekeeping event in question. Scheuer's (2001) study of Danish job interviews does much to

reconcile these opposed perspectives. He suggests that while “communicative style” does exist, it cannot be located at the individual level, but is instead held in common by networks of people who share similar experiences of “communicative socialization” (ibid. 240). He then connects a felicitous communicative style with both a candidate’s social background and the interview’s hybrid requirements. Successful candidates – who are disproportionately middle-class – are those who can “recontextualize” styles from other aspects of their life in the interview setting, and seamlessly move between these styles.

This conceptualization of the interview echoes Roberts and Sarangi’s (1999) study of oral interviews for the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP), in which successful candidates exhibit a communicative style that allows them to move fluently between different discourse modes related to their institutional, professional and life worlds. While their emphasis is on the (often misaligned) requirements of the interview, Roberts and Sarangi (ibid.) also show how these requirements work to the disadvantage of candidates whose formative communicative socialization took place outside the UK. Roberts and Campbell (2006) give clear analytic primary to the interactional requirements of the gatekeeping encounter itself, which individuals are shown to have greater or lesser access to as a result of their social, cultural and/or ethnic background.

Like Roberts and Campbell (2006), this paper is primarily geared towards characterizing the interactional requirements of the admissions interview, before it addresses how specific candidates from a privately-educated background engage with those requirements. In so doing, however, it will also become clear that the Cambridge admissions interview is quite different in scope and purpose from other gatekeeping encounters. Unlike job interviewers, for example, admissions interviewers are not choosing colleagues, nor are they ratifying an individual’s professional status (Roberts and Sarangi 1999). They are instead selecting candidates with whom they will have an ongoing pedagogical and scholarly relationship for a number of years, firstly as undergraduates, and potentially as postgraduates. The competences that are tested in the admissions interview are, as we shall see, closely aligned with that relationship.

3. Analytic approach and methodology

This study draws on the concepts developed within Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS), an approach which bridges the microanalysis of Conversation Analysis with more context-sensitive ethnographic perspectives (Roberts and Sarangi 1999). While such an approach began with the work of Gumperz, it has since been adapted by many scholars working within gatekeeping studies. The present study makes use of three related concepts drawn from this field of research: discourse modes or “modes of talk” (Roberts and Sarangi 1999), “roles” (Goffman 1959, 1961, 1974, Sarangi 2010) and their relational analogue, role relationships (ibid.).

The concept of “discourse modes”, associated primarily with the work of Celia Roberts (Roberts and Sarangi 1999, Roberts et al. 2005, Roberts and Campbell 2006) refers in broad terms to the various forms of talk that comprise an interview, constitute its hybridity, and mediate its various, and potentially contradictory, requirements. While this term is not always consistently used, or indeed used consistently, in the gatekeeping literature, interviews have been shown to be composed of various discourse modes. Roberts (2013) notes, for example, that job interviews often comprise an institutionally aligned “legitimate language” along with more personal modes of talk (see also Roberts and Sarangi 1999, above) that successful candidates are best able to blend. Specific modes of talk may also be brought about by participants shifting between the various “roles” afforded to them by that encounter (Sarangi 2010). Thus, in a doctor-patient setting, a doctor might index a shift between the various roles in his/her professional communicative repertoire (counsellor, clinician, teacher, gatekeeper) by selecting an appropriate discourse mode.

The Cambridge admissions interview has its own unique discourse modes, roles and role relationships, with similar scope for misalignment and crosstalk. Determining what these are, and how they interact, is therefore a central means of determining the linguistic capital of an interview. How well candidates respond to these shifting dynamics can be captured at the systemic level using microanalytical methods. However, in order to address the impact of a candidate’s schooling on their interview performance, recourse to ethnographic methods is also needed.

On this front, the sensitivities surrounding the admissions interviews have imposed certain methodological constraints on the following analysis. While Zimdars (2010, above) calls for an analysis of how physical appearance and demeanour play out during the interview, for example, permission was only given for interviews to be audio-recorded. There was, moreover, no opportunity to talk to candidates or interviewers, either pre- or post-interview. Interviewers' evaluations had to be gleaned instead from the notes they made on individual candidates – to which the researcher was given access, albeit without the permissions to quote from them directly. The fact that interviewers are required to give numerical scores out of ten for each candidate, which can be reproduced here, has proven useful for establishing a benchmark of felicitous linguistic behaviour and communicative style. Ethnographic data on candidates were also provided via the "personal statements" they submitted to the university, which include information on their age, sex, normal country of residence, details of the school(s) they attended, as well as a letter of motivation, typically detailing their stated (and curated) interest in the subject they have applied for, as well as their reasons for applying to study that subject in Cambridge.

4. Data

The following analysis is based on data from six audio-recorded admissions interviews in English literature, all of which were recorded in 2014 and subsequently transcribed, and each of which lasts for approximately 30 minutes (180 minutes total). The interviews within English Literature were selected from the broader CUI corpus, which spans a range of disciplines from the Natural Sciences to Architecture. In all cases, the informed consent of participating candidates was requested and obtained prior to their arrival in Cambridge. Candidates were, moreover, explicitly informed that they had the right not to participate in the study, or to withdraw from participating at any point without this prejudicing their application. It was also made clear to candidates that interviewers would have no access to the recorded interview data.

The decision to focus on English Literature in this preliminary study was based on two considerations. The first, as we shall see, is that English Literature opens up a space for a more candidate-centred discussion than is attested in the

STEM subjects. In this respect, its interactional dynamics are more complex and hybrid (see 5.1. Shifting rights to knowledge). Second, English Literature interviews are unique in the CUI corpus in comprising candidates from a range of British educational backgrounds (private, state, grammar), whose interview performance is the ongoing focus of public concern (Zimdars et al. 2009, Zimdars 2010).

All of the six candidates were in their late teenage years (mostly 17) at the time of interview. Of these candidates, two were educated in British private schools (one internationally famous); another was educated outside the UK; two were educated at grammar schools that are non-fee-paying yet academically selective; and one was from a state-maintained College of Continuing Education providing a mix of education in traditional academic subjects, vocational apprenticeships and other work-based qualifications. All of the interviews were conducted by two British interviewers (INT1 and INT2).

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Shifting rights to knowledge

In broad terms, the admissions interviews analysed here resemble other institutional encounters, such as job interviews, in their interactional organization. There is, for example, a characteristic asymmetric distribution of rights and turns (Drew and Heritage 1992) between the two sets of participants. Interviewers control topic selection and initiate the questioning of candidates, who typically respond in second turn, are interrupted more than they interrupt, and elaborate on answers when requested to do so (Akinnaso and Seabrook Ajirotutu 1982: 121). The institutionality of the admissions interview is also apparent in the asymmetric access that interviewers and candidates have towards its organizational procedures (Drew and Heritage 1992: 49-53). Indeed, in a clear attempt to make these procedures more transparent, one of the interviewers maps out the format and structure of the interview for each candidate during the introductory meet and greet (here called “Phase 1”, see Table 1).

Where these admissions interviews differ from other interview settings most markedly is the shifting manner in which they distribute knowledge and rights to

knowledge (ibid.). On the one hand, the interviewers sometimes orient to a teacher role, typically guiding the candidate qua student towards a particular interpretation or answer. This resembles the mentor-mentee relationship in other gatekeeping encounters, including academic counselling sessions (Erikson and Shultz 1982) and internship interviews (Tranekjær 2015). In all such encounters, knowledge and the rights to that knowledge reside firmly with the institutional representative. On the other hand, the admissions interviewers in this study also attempt to frame candidates as academic peers whose opinions and interpretations are inherently informative and valuable. On these occasions, knowledge and the rights to knowledge are distributed more freely between participants.

The structure of these admissions interviews appears purposefully designed to sequentially elicit these two types of role relationship. Phase 2 of the interview (Table 1), for example, lends itself to a pedagogical mode of talk, or mini-tutorial. In the Oxbridge tutorial model, undergraduate students – in pairs, or individually – discuss the essays they have written, based on the reading for that week, with their tutors. A similar scenario is simulated in Phase 2. Prior to their respective interviews, individual candidates write an essay in exam conditions comparing two specific poems, which are then collected and read by the interviewer before the interview takes place. This process can thus be thought of as a means of familiarizing candidates with the poetry they would be discussing, as would be the case in a real undergraduate tutorial. Importantly, however, the interviewer does not refer at all to the candidates' essays themselves during the interviews themselves. This underscores how Phase 2 of the interview is less a qualitative assessment of candidates' poetic insight, but rather a test of a candidate's communicative abilities (see 5.2. Pedagogy and Poetry), and particularly their student competencies, or teachability.

By contrast, the discussion in Phase 3 is systemically based around topics that INT2 draws from a candidate's personal statement or submitted work, which may reference novels, plays or poetry the candidate has read (with which the interviewer may be more or less familiar); school drama productions the candidate has directed; or even a candidate's own creative writing practice. By definition, this candidate-centred focus – which does not exist in STEM subject admissions

interviews – is status-raising, conferring on candidates greater knowledge and rights to knowledge than in Phase 2.

Phase	Description of phase	Approximate length of phase
1	Introduction/meet and greet	1 minute
2	Discussion of two poems (led by INT1)	13 minutes
3	Discussion of a candidate's personal statement (led by INT2)	13 minutes
4	Candidate's opportunity to ask questions	0-2 minutes

Table 1 – Structure of the interview

Given this structural division, the linguistic capital of the interview should in theory comprise a candidate's ability to perform each of these roles in sequence, namely that of the student in Phase 2, and then the peer academic in Phase 3. This turns out, however, to be only partly true. As we shall see, the (opposed) statuses they confer generate interactional tensions and misalignments whose effective management also constitutes a key part of the admissions interview's linguistic capital.

5.2. Pedagogy and poetry

Given that personal response is an inextricable feature of poetic interpretation, it is reasonable to assume that the interviewer (INT1) leading the discussion in Phase 2 would facilitate a candidate-driven appraisal of the poems at hand. However, perhaps because interviewers have already read the candidates' respective essays on these poems, the discussion is less obviously centred around the candidates' own interpretations. Phase 2 of the interview instead requires candidates, for the most part, to follow a trail of clues and discoursal breadcrumbs that typically lead towards the interviewer's own preferred poetic interpretation. In this sense, this phase of the interview is more clearly informed by a problem-solution format governed by the hierarchies and asymmetries of a teacher-student role relationship.

While the discussion of poetry in these interviews can be broadly divided into two areas: structure and prosody on the one hand, and imagery and theme on the

other, the discussion in each area is directed by the interviewer in a similar fashion. In each topic area, he progressively modifies or reformulates questions in such a way that will give candidates the quickest route to the answers he is looking for. This pattern is most clearly attested in questions concerning prosody and poetic structure, where the required analysis is unambiguously a matter of objective fact rather than personal interpretation. This dynamic is exemplified by the following extract:

Extract #1

1	INT1	where where does where in other kinds of sonnets do we find the
2		turn?
3	CAN	oh is it hh. six and eight? (1) is that the volta?
4	NT1	well how is a sonnet organized? [(0.5)] how is this sonnet organized?
5	CAN	[ehm]
6	CAN	it's:: in:: (1) is °it packs° of (.) four (1) four lines which which with
7		strong [ABAB lines]
8	INT1	[ok what do we call] units of four lines? (4) ( ) (2)
9		quatrains↑ you do know↑
10	CAN	oh I [(laughter)]
11	INT1	[yeah quatr- yeah] ok so ok so yeah four lines and then
12		what=
13	CAN	=yeah and that so f::our line °four lines four lines° and then the
14		two at the end (.) °the rhyming couplets so twelve and two
15		fourteen lines° (2) is that right? [(1)] °I haven't actually counted
16		yeah]
17		the lines yet I'll do it° (2) yeah
18	INT1	so s- in summary↑ yeah↑

The tightly-linked Initiation-Response-Feedback sequences, first identified by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) clearly show this to be a pedagogical mode of talk. This is further indexed by how INT1 reformulates his questions to scaffold the candidate's responses. After a dispreferred response in l. 3, for example, INT1 reformulates the question so it is more conceptually general (l. 4). He then modifies it, again, so that it

concerns the poem at hand (l. 4), thereby providing the candidate with methodology to arrive at the correct answer (counting the lines). The candidate herself clearly understands this to be a pedagogical exchange as she orients to a student role by framing many of her answers as questions designed to elicit the interviewer's help (l. 3, 6-7, 15). Indeed, INT1 does in fact provide an answer to his own question (l. 9) concerning the technical term "quatrain" (l. 9), which later helps to refine the candidate's final analysis.

Exchanges that involve a discussion of theme or imagery tend to be more loosely structured than those concerning poetic prosody or structure, with greater scope for candidates to determine the direction of the discussion. Nevertheless, after asking an initial question that is often general and open-ended (for example, "do you see the poems using these themes in different ways?"), INT1 then typically orients to a comparable pedagogical role, one that involves guiding candidates towards a specific interpretation. This is illustrated by the following extract, where the candidate has just provided an answer to a general question on the theme of doubt.

Extract #2

1	INT1	and when you:: again the:: ehm (2) you're sort of talking about
2		the sense of finality
3	CAN	uh huh=
4	INT1	=and ehm (1) ehm I mean this isn't ehm (.) you know this isn't
5		like ehm you know Donne sort of lying dying front of [his] doctors
6	CAN	[(laughter)]
7	CAN	yeah
8	INT1	ehm again I mean what is it that might hold up this sort of y'know
9		pr- pr- y'know ( ) distance us slightly from this sense of finality?
10		ehm >I mean you know in this< the POINT of finality I mean y'know
11		that there is a little time to run yet
12	CAN	uh huh
13	INT1	is there anything in the poem that suggests that? (2) you know
14		window of opportunity shall we say

The interviewer first provides a formulation (Heritage and Watson 1979) of the candidate's answer (l. 1-2) that reorients the discussion towards the theme of "finality". This is then followed by an account (l. 4-5) of John Donne's treatment of this theme which is pointedly contrasted with INT1's own interpretation of the poem at hand (l. 4-5 "this isn't…. like Donne"). The series of specific questions that follow this account encourage the candidate to search the poem for the specific line(s) that align with INT1's interpretation. Although he appears to provide the candidate with the option of rejecting this interpretation in l. 13, it is clear, as in Extract 1, that there is nonetheless a strongly preferred answer.

The use of such leading questions indexes a hierarchical teacher-student role relationship that might seem incommensurate with the egalitarian and personalized nature of individual poetic response and interpretation. However, this style of questioning also serves a practical function insofar as it reduces the interpretative burden that would otherwise fall on the candidate in this high-stakes, stressful encounter. The interviewer achieves this specifically, as in Extracts 1 and 2, by partly reducing poetic interpretation to a process of guided searching. Elsewhere, however, he simplifies the burden even further by presenting candidates with a series of binary interpretative choices:

#3	INT1	I mean does "frost" still primarily at this point in the poem lie within the literal domain=
	CAN	=I think=
	INT1	rather than the metaphorical one?

#4	INT1	do you do you think I mean if that is a kind of c- concluding or summary (0.5) statement or assertion I mean do you do you see that it it ehm that the poem ehm complicates it in any way or d'you think it's ehm very ti- tidily neatly argued?

#5	INT1	is there a sense of long ( ) sort of length to their love still or not long?

In the case of #4 and #5, the interviewer's preferred response is even indicated by the syntax of the questions themselves. In #4, for example, the preferred response is

embedded in the question "do you see that… the poem complicates it", whereas in #5 the dispreferred answer appears as a reduced sentence-final fragment ("or not long?"). Candidates are, of course, implicitly expected to elaborate on their answers rather than simply select one of the binary options, but these responses are themselves typically followed by further leading questions.

Given that the marked use of leading questions underscores an essentially pedagogical role relationship, it is unsurprising that Phase 2 contains relatively few interactional tensions between interviewer and candidate. Even when a candidate is unsure of the answer s/he is expected to produce, INT1 is prepared to encourage, scaffold and support the attempt (#1, #10). This role relationship changes quite significantly, however, during Phase 3, when these pedagogical stabilizers are, in effect, removed.

5.3. The plight of the peer academic

Unlike Phase 2, Phase 3 appears designed to open up a space for candidates to actively showcase their knowledge of the subject they have applied for. This is facilitated primarily by the interviewers asking open questions on topics drawn from a candidate's personal statement and/or submitted work, with which – it is assumed – s/he will have a greater degree of familiarity, interest and competence or expertise. In doing so, interviewers implicitly confer on candidates greater rights to knowledge (Drew and Heritage 1992: 49-53) than in Phase 2. While this might sound respectful and even convivial, the egalitarian discourse mode that the interviewer is attempting to establish is, in actual fact, more austerely academic in tone. In that sense, Phase 3 is more akin to a PhD viva than a book club meeting.

At the interactional level, interviewers intentionally frame candidates not as students, but rather as peer academics engaged in an intellectual discussion or debate. This is sometimes subtly achieved, as when the direct questions characteristic of Phase 2 (#1, #2, #3, #5) are qualified ("I was wondering…") and/or when they are recast into intellectual propositions or invitations to speak (#6, #7, #8). Most obviously, however, this new role relationship is expressed through an abstruse academic register of language:

#6	INT2	I was wondering if you could expatiate on the use of wonder (.) in literature in general (.) what utility does wonder have?
#7	INT2	I was wondering does humour always rely on a sense of superiority for its operations?
#8	INT1	the idea of disorder ehm seems to be (.) fundamental to comedy doesn't it and the re(.)constitution (.) renewal of society requires the dissolving of hierarchy for a moment (.) I mean how do you see that relating to tragedy?

Part of the linguistic capital of Phase 3 is thus for candidates to respond to highly abstract ideas expressed in an elevated style that purposefully makes few concessions to their youth or academic inexperience. Although candidates are by definition not peer academics, this phase of the interview requires them to project and maintain the pretence that they are.

This phase shift (Adelswärd 1988) towards a peer-peer discourse mode proves to be challenging for many candidates, who up to this point in the interview have oriented to a familiar teacher-student role relationship. What is particularly challenging, however, is how this new mode of talk often requires candidates themselves to resolve the interactional tensions that emerge from its underlying pretence. This is acutely apparent at moments when candidates fail to demonstrate the knowledge that this mode of talk confers on them; for example, when a candidate simply fails to understand the interviewer's question. When this occurs in Phase 2, a candidate's request for clarification or help is permissible within the scope of the dominant pedagogical role relationship. Within the peer-peer discourse mode, however, a candidate's inability to answer a question may not just cast doubt on his/her individual academic capabilities, it also threatens to derail the very discourse mode that governs the interaction. This occurs on multiple occasions, of which the following example – on the theme of escapism – is a particularly good illustration:

Extract #9

1	INT	can the idea of escapism itself be political?
2	CAN	Politic- political [in] what sense?
3	INT	[can]
4	INT	the idea of escapism I'm or just actually in a general sense I mean
5		can it have kind of political valences just <the idea of escapism>? (2)
6		does that have potential political ramifications or is it antithetical to
7		the political?
8	INT	(2) ehm (0.5) what is is escaping into=
9	INT	=yeah I mean e- esCAPing into a kind of imaginary world wh[ere]
10	CAN	[yeah]
11	INT	we don't have sort of hhh. ehm (.) I don't know where we don't have
12		a kind of allegorical sensibility you know it's not satirical i-[i-]
13	CAN	[yeah]
14	INT	ostensibly it's actually divorced from one's own reality I'm [saying]
15	CAN	[uh huh]
16	INT	can the idea of escapism in itself be inherently political or is it
17		divorced from the political?
18	CAN	O::h I see like sort of forming your own ideal society within a
19		fantasy=
20	INT	=[potentially]=
21	CAN	[is that]
22	INT	=yeah [I mean yeah]
23	CAN	[( )]
24	CAN	yeah I suppose inevitably it is because it has to be (.) for it to be (.)
25		fantasti::c it has to be (.) very different from the world that we live in
26		now so I suppose you have to (.) explore different (.) sorts of political
27		(.) structures an- and ideas (0.5) and maybe you'd look upon them
28		more fondly if it was (0.5) fantasy
29	INT	interesting so it's that divergence from the real [which embodies] the
30	CAN	[from the real]
31	INT	politics some[how] but it does so implicitly and not explicitly
32	CAN	[yeah]

33	CAN	Uh huh I would say so=
34	INT	=ok

It is clear from the candidate's response on two occasions (l. 2, 8) that she does not understand the interviewer's question. Within the pedagogical mode of talk characteristic of Phase 2, the interviewer would normally break down the question into its constituent parts, thereby providing a pathway to the preferred solution (see #1, #10). In this extract, however, the candidate's very requests for clarification are dispreferred within the terms of this mode of talk. This is clearly shown in INT2's 'clarification', which is more opaque than his original question. Cast as a form of hyper-questioning (l. 4-7), INT2 elaborates on his question in precisely the recondite register of language ("valences", "ramifications", "antithetical") characteristic of the peer-peer discourse mode (#6, #7 and #8). He thus prioritizes maintaining the illusion of symmetrical analytical knowledge and capabilities over the interactional need for a more pedagogical mode of talk.

It is during these moments in Phase 3 that breakdowns in communication between candidate and interviewer are most likely to occur. In Extract #9, however, the candidate in question manages to deal with the situation effectively. After her initial confusion, she reinterprets INT2's questions on her own terms (l. 18-19) and then martials a response (l. 24-28). Regardless of the content value of that response, which is unclear from INT2's reaction (l. 20,22), she demonstrates an ability to maintain the intellectual discussion in the interviewer's preferred mode of talk, thereby resolving the interactional tension.

5.4. Cui bono?

Informed by the social concerns detailed above, such an analysis raises questions about which (groups of) candidates are best able to "embrace" (Goffman 1961), and transition between, the variety of opposed roles and discourse modes that the admissions interview requires of them, and thus, which have the greatest linguistic capital.

The candidate in Extract #9 ("G2", Table 2, below) received the highest score of any of the candidates. Contrary to what we might expect, however, she was not from

an elite private school, but rather a non-fee-paying, though academically selective, grammar school. Indeed, the results from this particular cohort of English Literature candidates reveals that it is the privately educated students who actually received the lowest numerical scores.

Candidate	P1	P2	G1	O1	S1	G2
INT1	6	6	7	8	8	8.5
INT2	7	7	7.5	8	8	8.5
Av. Score	6.5	6.5	7.25	8	8	8.5

1 = worst performance possible; 10 = best performance. Notation: P = British Private School, G = British Grammar School, S = British State School, O = Overseas School; 1,2 = identifying number within category.

Table 2: Candidate's educational background against numerical evaluation

These results are anomalous when compared with admissions offers from across the university as a whole, where privately educated candidates appear to do disproportionately well. In 2014, English Literature candidates from British private schools comprised 26% of applications yet 34% of offers (+8%), compared with 53% of applications from British state schools yet 57% of offers (+4%) (University of Cambridge Application Statistics). Applicants from overseas schools were the least successful, comprising 20% of applications, yet only 9% of offers (-11%) (ibid.); a result that is, again, out of step with the figures in Table 2, where the single overseas candidate performs relatively well. Admissions offers are not coextensive with interview scores, as other factors – such as submitted work – may also be consequential for a candidate's chances of receiving an offer. Moreover, some candidates who have applied to Cambridge are not invited to interview (though figures on this are lacking). Nevertheless, the discrepancy between these interview scores and broader admissions figures point to the need for more extensive sampling (see Conclusion) and further qualitative analysis.

Table 2 shows that the privately educated candidates are given the lowest evaluations by INT1, who leads the Phase 2 poetry discussion. By contrast, they are evaluated as performing relatively better by INT2, who leads the discussion of candidates' personal statements in Phase 3. Such differential scoring is not found in

the evaluations of the best-performing candidates (O1, S1, G2), who receive the same score from both interviewers. Although the evidence is insufficient to make generalizations, it may be significant that the privately educated candidates perform relatively better in Phase 3, where the dominant discourse mode lends itself to the communicative showmanship and self-actualized performance that private schools are believed to instil in their pupils. Conversely, these traits may also work against these candidates in contexts where interactional asymmetries and hierarchized asymmetries predominate. A mixed-method account of the interview performance of the two privately educated candidates (“P1” and “P2”) gives a clearer picture of how and why this might be the case.

5.5. One mode of talk, three ways of failing

An analysis based on relative volubility, which can be defined as the percentage of words candidates utter vis-à-vis their interviewers, shows that P1 and P2 are the most voluble within the entire cohort (Table 3). This aligns with the results from Scheuer (2001) which also show that unsuccessful job interview candidates demonstrate an uneven distribution of talk (either under 40% or over 60% relative volubility). While none of the candidates in this study drops under 40% volubility, Table 3 confirms that increasing levels of relative volubility correlate neatly with decreasing average interview scores, with >60% acting as a significant threshold.

Candidate	P1	P2	G1	O1	S1	G2
Vol. %	67%	66%	62%	60%	57%	54%
Av. Score	6.5	6.5	7.25	8	8	8.5

Table 3. Relative candidate volubility against interview score

It appears, then, that the privately educated candidates in these interviews hold the floor substantially more than both their interviewers, and their peers and that this reflects a characteristic of unsuccessful interview candidates more broadly. Such a quantitative analysis cannot, however, explain the underlying reasons for this correlation, nor why P1 and P2 appear to underperform especially poorly in Phase 2.

An interactional analysis confirms that the two privately educated candidates

demonstrate the greatest resistance, or “role distancing” (Goffman 1961) to the teacher-student role relationship and its associated pedagogical mode of talk during this phase. What is interesting is that this “role distancing” is expressed in two divergent, though equally infelicitous, ways; a fact which also challenges the popular belief that privately educated candidates share, and benefit from, a uniform communicative style.

In the case of “P2”, his performance is characterized by a generalized lack of engagement. Far more than any other candidate, P2 is repeatedly asked to expand on, or be more specific about, his responses to the interviewer’s questions. Why this is the case is unclear. (Post-interview discussions with candidates – and the permission to conduct these – might have provided greater insight.) In all cases, the result is an uneven, spluttering interactional flow between him and INT1. At certain points, P2 is in fact unable to produce an answer of any kind, as the following extract shows:

Extract #10

1	INT1	yes ok (1) yes and (.) what about the:: the lines yes ‘till’ (1) again
2		one of those kind of (.) the links between A and B hhh. we have this
3		kind ‘till testy age grey hairs shall snow upon thy head [hhh.] (1)
4	CAN	[uh huh]
5		whose mask nor show’ what do you think those what do you think (.)
6		the ‘mask’ or ‘show’ means there?
7	CAN	(10) I’m not sure (.) ehm (3)
8	INT1	Have a guess (10) think about ‘show’ more than ‘mask’ I think
9	CAN	(6) ehm (20) () I’m drawing a blank (1) ehm
10	INT1	well it could be a kind of en- entertainment (.) y’know like and like
11		[masked] balls or a mask (.) hhh. again it’s ehm >well you know<
12	CAN	[yes]
13		it’s a point of [difficulty] in the=
14		[()]
15		=yeah=
16		=in the [text] (.) y’know and ehm=

17 CAN [ehm]

As we have seen elsewhere in Phase 2, this extract is underscored by a problem-solution format in which INT1 attempts to guide the candidate towards a preferred (or ‘correct’) poetic interpretation. However, in this case, P2 neither engages with this format, nor orients to the requisite student-teacher role relationship. The many extended silences (l.7,9) are unproductive, meaning P2 fails to deliver either an answer to INT1’s questions, or a means of sustaining a dialogue with him. Indeed, the importance of maintaining dialogue, and the communicative skills that underpin this, is underscored in l. 8, when INT1 encourages MP2 to “have a guess”. In their written notes, the interviewers comment explicitly on P2’s perceived lack of engagement during Phase 2, but also – in keeping with the numerical scores – his improvement in this regard during Phase 3.

The interview performance of the other privately educated candidate in these interviews, P1, makes for a stark contrast in this respect. Although P1 also receives a low score for Phase 2, this is not because he fails to engage sufficiently with INT1, but rather because he actively rejects the interactional asymmetries that characterize it. While most candidates implicitly identify and orient to Phase 2 as a pedagogical mode of talk in which they are guided towards a correct answer, P1 treats this encounter instead as a meeting of equals jointly engaged in a discussion. Or, in the terms of the model outlined above, he reframes the teacher-student role relationship as a peer-peer relationship from the outset, assuming a more symmetrical distribution of knowledge and rights to knowledge than is expected or required during this phase of the interview.

This is apparent from P1’s very first words. In response to INT1’s standard request for candidates to consider why the poems at hand have been put together for comparison, P1 chooses to compliment the interviewer by responding with “Good question!” Such compliments typically occur, and may be sincerely appreciated, in academic contexts where participants share a similar status, such as the Q&As that follow talks at academic conferences. In this encounter, however, this compliment is both highly marked, and readily interpretable as an attempted levelling of the asymmetries to which candidates are implicitly expected to orient. This is further reflected in the way P1 orients to INT1’s feedback in the rest of the interview. Unlike

all of the other candidates, who engage in backchannelling that emphasizes comprehension ("uh huh" "yeah"), P1 instead tends to ratify INT1's poetic analyses ("that's true" "that's very true"), thereby positioning himself more clearly as an academic equal than a student.

The biggest challenge to P1's attempt to frame the interview as a peer-peer encounter is what to do when he does not know the answer to a question. This is a systemic problem in Phase 3, as we have seen, when candidates often struggle to satisfy the greater expectations of knowledge conferred on them by the peer-peer discourse mode. For P1, however, it is a particular problem in Phase 2 where his desire to establish a peer-peer role relationship means he is less willing to draw on the resources, such as asking for clarification or help, that a pedagogical discourse mode affords. He responds to these moments instead in a variety of idiosyncratic ways. At certain points, he attempts to assert co-membership (Erickson and Shultz 1982). When asked about the structure of the poem, for example, he prefaces his difficulty with poetic scansion by inviting the interviewer into his confidence:

Extract #11

1	CAN	I suppose you talk about (.) in a sonnet you talk about (.) metre (.)
2		and the iambic pentameter
3	INT1	OK
4	CAN	but ehm often I find it I find it really hard >I'm gonna make a
5		confession here< to fin- to f- to work out whether it is actually in (.)
6		iambic pentameter

At other points, P1 engages in various face-saving (Goffman 1955) acts that include a comparable admission (or "confession") that he does not know the answer to a question, either prefaced or followed by a redressive utterance. In Extract #12, for example, P1 attempts to spin his insecurities about the shortcomings of his essay, which he voluntarily references, as a demonstration of moral virtue:

#12	CAN	ehm (.) a lot of things I wrote I'm not really sure about
		(laughing) but I WROTE THEM NONETHELESS

At a later point in the interview, when he is unable to answer the interviewer's question about the location of a poetic turn, he chooses to reject the epistemological importance of the question itself. As in #12, the utterance in question comprises an admission ("I'm not really sure…"), a face-saving performative ("I say this with confidence"), and finally an emphatic assertion ("it FEELS that the POEM WORKS"):

Extract #13

1	CAN	=I mean I it's I I (.) y'know I say this with confidence I'm not really sure
2		where it where it comes I p-=
3	INT1	=yeah=
4	INT1	=where I might put it but it FEELS that the POEM WORKS

As an essentially inner psychological state, the candidate's level of confidence is unfathomable and a fortiori a moot point for any interactional analysis (cf. Zimdars 2010). This utterance does, however, suggest that the projection of confidence is a strategic aim for this candidate, as well as a means of redressing the obvious (and uncomfortable) disparity in knowledge between himself and his interviewer. Indeed, this helps to explain P1's subtle shift in stance towards the question itself (l. 2-4). Initially, he appears to acknowledge that there is an objective answer to this question in l.2 ("where it comes"). By l.4, however, this changes so that it becomes a matter of personal preference ("where I might put it"). With his emphatic assertion, however, he rejects the question entirely by suggesting that the location of the turn is less important than the poem's effectiveness (l. 4).

The interviewers' notes do not reflect explicitly on P1's strategic self-projections, or even on his idiosyncratic orientation to the admissions interview, though this fact is also not particularly surprising. Even "backstage" (Goffman 1959), interviewers maintain the idea that a candidate's answers can be understood and evaluated on the basis of their epistemological merit, which are sanctioned, rather than with reference to a perceived breach of their own rights and privileges, which would be unsanctioned. To do otherwise would be to cast doubt on the interview orthodoxy (Button 1987), and the objectivity assumed to underpin and justify its

practitioners' judgements. Nevertheless, the notes on P1 do suggest some interaction between these sanctioned and unsanctioned criteria. Although the candidate is described as articulate, he is also perceived as heedless, either because he draws unjustified conclusions, or because he fails to engage with questions in a careful or thoughtful manner. Such comments resonate with the interactional analysis above, where P1's self-distancing from the dominant teacher-student role relationship also amounts to resisting the guiding hand that candidates are implicitly expected to accept in the admissions interview. In other words, he appears less teachable than other candidates.

6. Conclusion

This preliminary study of the Cambridge undergraduate admissions interview problematizes the concept of "linguistic capital", as discussed by previous scholars. Contra Bourdieu (1991) – and indeed the lay perceptions of the British public – it finds that speaking the standard variety of English associated with the British upper middle class is not correlated with a successful interview performance; a finding that is supported with reference to admittance patterns from the broader CUI corpus. Like Roberts and Campbell (2006), this study finds instead that "linguistic capital" is more productively thought of as the knowledge and ability to manage and transition between the various, and sometimes contradictory, role relationships and discourse modes that comprise this communicative event. That being said, the blending of assessment interview and university tutorial that characterizes this encounter also serves to broaden, and challenge, our conventional understanding of the interview setting.

A frequent observation within the IS literature on job interviews is the mismatch between the communicative skills required by the job interview, and the entirely separate skill set of the job itself. Roberts (2011) and Roberts and Campbell (2006) note that applicants are often expected to project a corporate ethos that may bear scant relation to the requirements of the low-paid, monotonous job on offer. Indeed, Roberts and Campbell's (ibid) reference to the "interview game" or Adelswärd's (1988: 77) "hidden agenda" imply that the vast majority of job interviews comprise, in effect, a closed set of non-transferable (and therefore otiose) communicative

knowledge and skills. Such criticisms cannot be so easily levelled at the Cambridge interviews analysed here, however, where the interaction bears a close resemblance to the university tutorial it seeks to imitate (see 5.1. Shifting Rights to Knowledge). Even Phase 3 of these interviews, which often confers on candidates the pretended status of a peer academic, is recognizable as a form of (elevated) academic discourse, albeit one more commonly found at postgraduate level.

This points to a fundamental difference in the scope and purpose of the Cambridge admissions interview. At the most superficial level, it is simply another people-sorting event like any other interview. However, the gatekeeping prize on offer – admittance to an elite institution of higher learning – imposes specific discourse requirements which are suited to obtaining that prize (Levinson 1979), and which distinguish it from other similar activity types (ibid.). Scheuer (2001), for example, shows that an informal, egalitarian, personalized (Fairclough 1992) communicative style is key to success in his corpus of job interviews. Yet the admissions interviews analysed here are not especially informal or personalized in tone, nor are they egalitarian in the sense Scheuer describes (quantitative measures of volubility notwithstanding). In Phase 3, as we have seen, it is the effort to establish an intellectual egalitarianism that causes candidates most interactional difficulty. It is similarly difficult to validate Robert's (2011) observation from job interviews that successful individuals must embody the autonomous yet team-spirited persona of the "enterprising self" (du Gay 1996). In the interviews analysed here, the candidate (P1) who most clearly resembles such a description does, in fact, do badly as the team-spirited egalitarian ethos he performs is misaligned with the teacher-student asymmetries required by Phase 2. This serves, once again, to underscore the distinctive interactional requirements of these admissions interviews, while also raising questions about the impact of educational background on interview performance.

While this study has helped to adumbrate the interactional requirements of these admissions interviews, the limited sample size prevents a fuller discussion of which groups may be advantaged or disadvantaged in the competition for a place (Zimdars 2010). Indeed, although it is clear, here, that candidates from educationally privileged backgrounds perform poorly in the pedagogical discourse mode, they appear to do so in divergent ways, a contradiction which cannot be teased out with

reference to these data alone. Progress on this front firstly requires more analysis of interviews within English Literature and other Humanities subjects in order to determine the validity of the discourse modes and role relationships identified here. While the STEM subjects clearly lack a peer-peer discourse mode, there is also evidence to suggest that its pedagogical mode is expressed differently to that of the Humanities, which itself requires further investigation. Once a more robust taxonomy of discourse modes and role relationships has been established, targeted sampling of candidates from particular backgrounds should give a clearer picture of their relative linguistic capital; even more so if ethnographic interviews with candidates are permitted.

Finally, however, questions also remain about the sufficiency of "linguistic capital" as a concept to explain the outcomes of this gatekeeping event. There is an understandable emphasis within much of the IS literature on knowledge of the "interview game" (Roberts and Campbell 2006) as the key to success, given the prevailing institutional, corporate and ideological demands to which job interviews, in particular, are subject (ibid.). Yet, as we have seen, Cambridge admissions interview are not like other interviews in these respects. Although "linguistic capital" has been demonstrated as important within English Literature interviews, this study is limited by its inability to assess the academic quality of the candidates' answers. It is likely that an analysis of STEM subject interviews would expose this limitation even more acutely, as even the most eloquent, genial and communicatively adroit candidate would not be accepted without the ability to solve mathematical and/or scientific problem sets. In their analysis of RCPG interviews, Roberts and Sarangi (1999) reflect on, and acknowledge, the comparable limitations of their analysis and contribution as linguists. A key difference, however, is that the Cambridge – and indeed Oxford – admissions interview systems is subject to far greater criticism and social concern. This points, in the final analysis, to the need for a research design in which linguists work in concert with interviewers themselves, along with Educational Sociologists, to establish both the communicative and epistemological factors that bear down on this unique gatekeeping encounter.

Transcription Conventions

Symbol	Gloss	Denotation
INT1		Interviewer speaking
INT2		Interviewer 2 speaking
CAN		Candidate speaking
d-	letter or partial word with hyphen	word cut off
=	equals sign	latching
(.)	full stop inside parentheses	micropause
(2)	number inside parentheses	timed pause in seconds
[ ]	square brackets	overlapping talk
( )	space between parentheses	unintelligible utterance
↑	upward arrow	rising intonation
::	colons	lengthens previous sound
<u>and</u>	underlining	emphasis
AND	word in capitals	increased volume
hh.	hh then fullstop	speaker out-breath
hhh.	hhh then fullstop	speaker in-breath

>and<	>word in inward chevrons<	spoken more quickly
<and>	<word in outward chevrons>	spoken more slowly
(laughter)	‘laughter’ in parentheses	laughter

References

Adelswärd, Viveka. 1988. Styles of success: on impression management as collaborative action in job interviews. Linköping Studies in Arts and Science 23. Linköping: University of Linköping.

Akinnaso, F. Niyi and Cheryl Seabrook Ajirotutu. 1982. Performance and ethnic style in job interviews. In John J. Gumperz (ed.), *Language and social identity,* 119–144. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Auer, Peter. 1998. Learning how to play the game: an investigation of role-played job interviews in East Germany. *Text* 18. 7-38.

Auer, Peter and Friederike Kern. 2001. Three ways of analysing communication between East and West Germans as intercultural communication. In Aldo di Luzio, Susanne Gunthner and Franca Orletti (eds.) *Culture in communication: analyses of intercultural situations*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Birkner, Karin. 2004. Hegemonic struggles or transfer of knowledge? East and West Germans in job interviews. *Journal of Language and Politics* 3(2). 293-322.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. Language and symbolic power. Translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Button, Graham. 1987. Answers as Interactional Products. Two sequential practices used in interviews. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 50(2). 160-171.

De Vries. 2014. Earning by degrees: differences in the career outcomes of UK graduates. The Sutton Trust. https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Earnings-by-Degrees-REPORT-1.pdf Last accessed 2/1/2021.

Drew, Paul and John Heritage. 1992. *Talk at work*. Cambridge: CUP.

Du Gay, Paul. 1996. *Consumption and identity at work*. London: Sage.

Erickson, Frederick. 2011. The gatekeeping encounter as a social form and as a site for face work. In Christopher Candlin and Srikant Sarangi (eds.) *Handbook of communication in organisations and professions,* 433-454. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Erickson, Frederick and Jeffrey Shultz. 1982. *The counselor as gatekeeper: social interaction in interviews*. New York: Academic Press.

Fairclough, Norman. 1992. *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1955. On face-work: an analysis of ritual elements in social interaction. *Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 18: 213-231.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Goffman, Erving. 1961. *Encounters: two studies in the sociology of interaction*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame analysis: an essay on the organization of experience*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1981. *Forms of talk*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gumperz, John and Dell Hymes (eds.). 1972. *Directions in sociolinguistics: the ethnography of communication*. USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

Gumperz, John. 1982. *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge: CUP.

Gumperz, John, Celia Roberts and Thomas Cyprian Jupp. 1979. *Crosstalk: a study of cross-cultural communication*. Southall, Middlesex: National Centre for Industrial Language Teaching.

Heritage, John. 2004. Conversation analysis and institutional talk. In Kristine Fitch and Robert Sanders (eds.) *Handbook of language and social interaction*, 103-147. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Heritage, John and Rod Watson. 1979. Formulations as conversational objects. In George Psathas (ed.), *Everyday language: studies in ethnomethodology*, 123–162. New York: Irvington.

Hymes, Dell. 1972. Models of the interaction of language and social life. In John Gumperz and Dell Hymes (eds.) *Directions in sociolinguistics: the ethnography of communciation*, 35-71. USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

Johnston, Alexandra. 2008. Co-membership in immigration gatekeeping interviews: construction, ratification and refutation. *Discourse & Society* 19(1). 21-41.

Kerekes, Julie. 2006. Winning an interviewer's trust in a gatekeeping encounter. *Language in Society* 35(1). 27–57.

Kerekes, Julie. 2007. The co-construction of a gatekeeping encounter: an inventory of verbal actions. *Journal of Pragmatics* 39. 1942-1973.

Kirilova, Marta. 2012. All dressed up and nowhere to go: linguistic, cultural and ideological aspects of job interviews with second language speakers of Danish. Unpublished PhD thesis. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.

Levinson, Stephen. 1979. Activity types and language. *Linguistics* 17(5). 356-399.

Roberts, Celia. 2011. Gatekeeping discourse in employment interviews. In Christopher Candlin and Srikant Sarangi (eds.), *Handbook of communication in organisations and professions*, 407-432. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Roberts, Celia. 2013. The gatekeeping of Babel: job interviews and the linguistic penalty. In Alexandre Duchêne, Melissa Moyer and Celia Roberts (eds.) *Language, migration and social inequalities*, 81-94. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Roberts, Celia and Sarah Campbell. 2006. *Talk on trial: job-interviews, language and ethnicity*. Leeds: Corporate document services.

Roberts, Celia and Srikant Sarangi. 1999. Hybridity in gatekeeping discourse: issues of practical relevance for the researcher. In Srikant Sarangi and Celia Roberts (eds.), *Talk, work and institutional order: discourse in medical, meditation and management settings*, 473-504. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Sarangi, Srikant. 1994. Intercultural or not? Beyond celebration of cultural differences in miscommunication analysis. *Pragmatics* 4(3). 409-427.

Sarangi, Srikant. 2010. Reconfiguring self/identity/status/role: the case of professional role performance in healthcare encounters. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice* 7(1). 75-95.

Scheuer, Jann. 2001. Recontextualisation and communicative styles in job interviews. *Discourse Studies* 3. 223-248.

Shea, David Patrick. 1994. Perspective and production: Structuring conversational participation across cultural borders. *Pragmatics* 4(3). 357-389.

Sinclair, John and Malcolm Coulthard. 1975. *Towards an analysis of discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Speer, Susan and Cerri Parsons. 2006. Gatekeeping gender: some features of the use of hypothetical questions in the psychiatric assessment of transsexual patients. *Discourse & Society* 17(6). 785-812.

Tranekjær, Louise. 2015. *Interactional categorization and gatekeeping*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

University of Cambridge Application Statistics. https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/sites/www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/files/publications/undergrad_admissions_statistics_2014_cycle.pdf Last accessed 2/1/2021.

Zimdars, Anna, Alice Sullivan and Anthony Heath. 2009. Elite higher education admissions in the arts and sciences: is cultural capital the key? *Sociology* 43. 648-666.

Zimdars, Anna. 2010. Fairness and undergraduate admission: a qualitative exploration of admissions choices at the University of Oxford. *Oxford Review of Education* 36(3). 307-323.

Author biography

Daniel Weston is an Assistant Professor of Linguistics in the School of English at the University of Hong Kong. In addition to the discourse analytical investigation of gatekeeping encounters, his research interests include bilingual pragmatics (code-switching) and English dialectology. He has published in a variety of journals on these topics, including the *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *International Journal of Bilingualism* and *English World-Wide*.