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# Enabling interaction: A study of examiner behaviour in an interactive speaking test

## A mixed methods study of the Trinity GESE Interactive Task

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The Future of English Language Teaching Conference ONLINE

#FoELT

# Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE)

- One examiner, one candidate
- GESE Grades 7 and 8 – CEFR B2
- Three tasks
  - Topic Discussion
  - Interactive Task
  - Conversation
- Interactive task generates candidate-led interaction

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# Purpose of the study

- To investigate what strategies are used by examiners in the GESE Interactive Task
- To investigate whether the strategies found have an effect on objective measures of candidate performance

# Corpus transcripts

- Complete transcriptions of Interactive Tasks extracted from the corpus
- Examined linguistic and para-linguistic behaviour of both examiners and candidates
- 54 transcripts
- 37 Interactive Prompts
- 10 nationalities

# Methodology

- Examiners
  - Grounded theory developed a taxonomy of strategies that examiners use to allow candidates to take the lead in interaction
  - Identified 8 strategies
- Candidates
  - Quantitative analysis of the candidates' responses to the different strategies
  - Fluency
  - Lexis
  - Grammar

# Examiner strategies

- ACCEPTING
- HOLDING
- INAUTHENTICITY
- PARSIMONY
- REFORMULATING
- REJECTING
- RESOLVING
- STEERING

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- Behaviour such as
  - Clarifying
  - Confirming
  - Repeating
  - Restating the original dilemma

# Example - REFORMULATING

*My nephew wants to work in the music business when he leaves school, but his parents think he should go to university. I'm not sure I agree with them.*

<S> and er if he er can find a good job to to go to live to live to have a good life why not? </u>

<E> but he </u>

<S> do you agree? </u>

<E> he doesn't want to go to university he wants to leave school at sixteen </u>

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- A neutral response that maintains the dialogue but doesn't appear to make demands upon its direction
- May include information intended to add grist to the mill of the candidate’s questioning

# Examiner strategies

- ACCEPTING
- HOLDING
- INAUTHENTICITY
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- REFORMULATING
- REJECTING
- RESOLVING
- STEERING

- Overtly asking for solutions
- Overtly or more subtly steering a candidate towards an outcome apparently preferred by the examiner
- Proffering own solutions
- Raising the stakes
- Pseudo-passivity

# Example – HOLDING

*My teenage nephew has decided that he wants to take up boxing as a way to get fit. I'm not sure it's such a great idea.*

<E> I I don't know really I think erm perhaps he's got some new friends who are older than him and and they are really into boxing </u>

<S> mm </u>

<E> and so maybe it's because of his friends you know </u>

<S> mm </u>

<E> and they're they're not nice boys they're bad boys you know </u>

# Example – HOLDING

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<E> and they're they're not nice boys they're bad boys you know </u>

# Example – STEERING

*My teenage nephew has decided that he wants to take up boxing as a way to get fit. I'm not sure it's such a great idea.*

<E> I I don't know really I think erm perhaps he's got some new friends who are older than him and and they are really into boxing </u>

<S> mm </u>

<E> and so maybe it's because of his friends you know </u>

<S> mm </u>

<E> and they're they're not nice boys they're bad boys you know </u>

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- Giving limited information in response to a request (in an apparently unforthcoming way)
- Giving a minimal response to prompt the candidate to contribute / question more

# Example - PARSIMONY

*My nephew used to dress very well, but now he's totally changed his appearance and I'm not sure now what to think about it.*

<S> yes so er nowa= he has just changed or want to change </u>

<E> no he has changed </u>

<S> has changed </u>

<E> totally changed </u>

<S> totally changed </u>

<E> yeah his appearance yes </u>

<S> okay well it's a pity </u>

<E> mm </u>

<S> no </u>

<E> mm </u>

# What follows the strategy? Performance

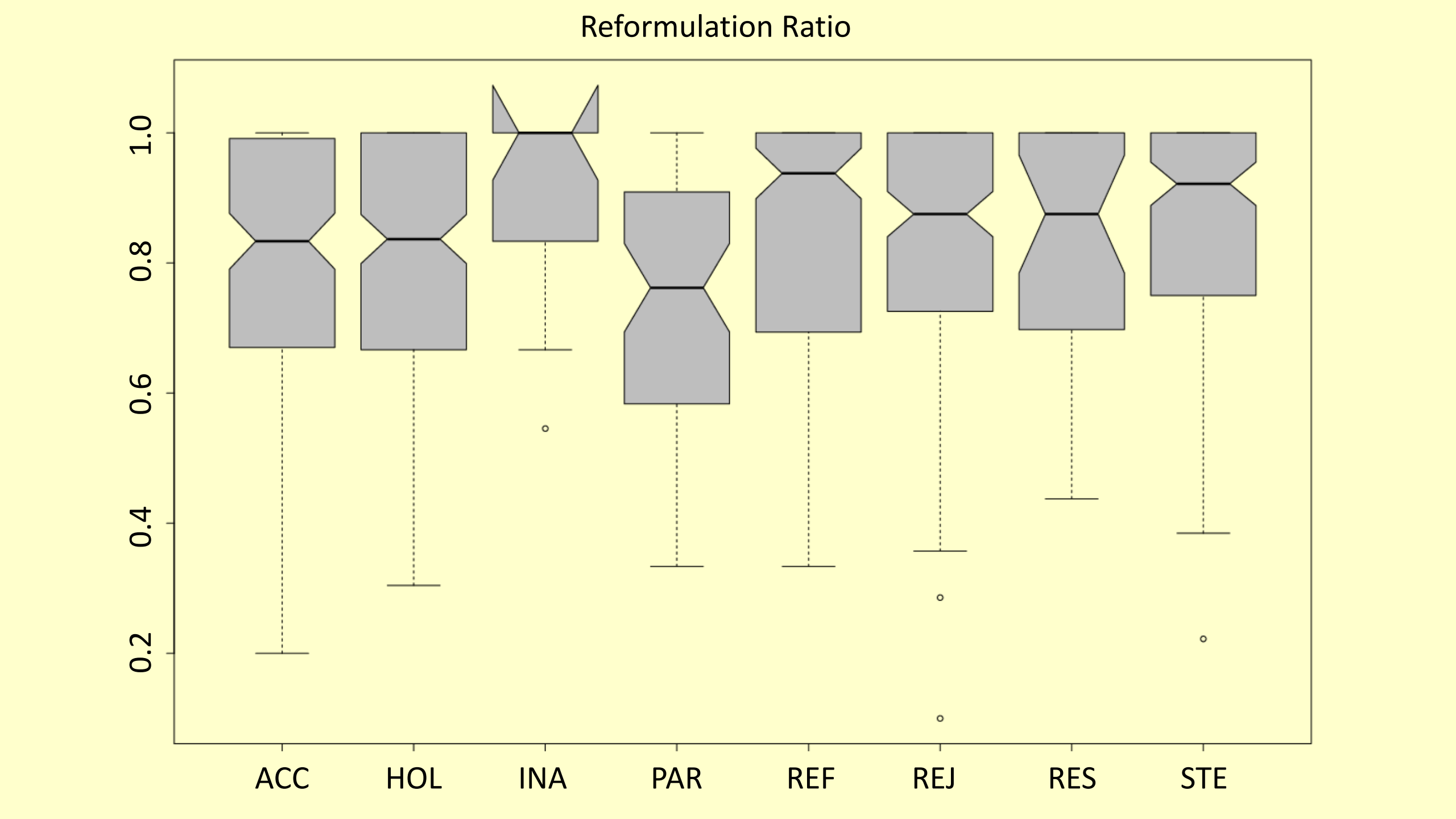
- Extracted all candidate responses that followed the strategies
- Across 8 strategies, 886 examples of performance
- Created three responses
  - Original response (backchannels removed)
  - Response with pauses removed
  - Pruned response (after Iwashita, Brown, McNamara & O'Hagan, 2008)

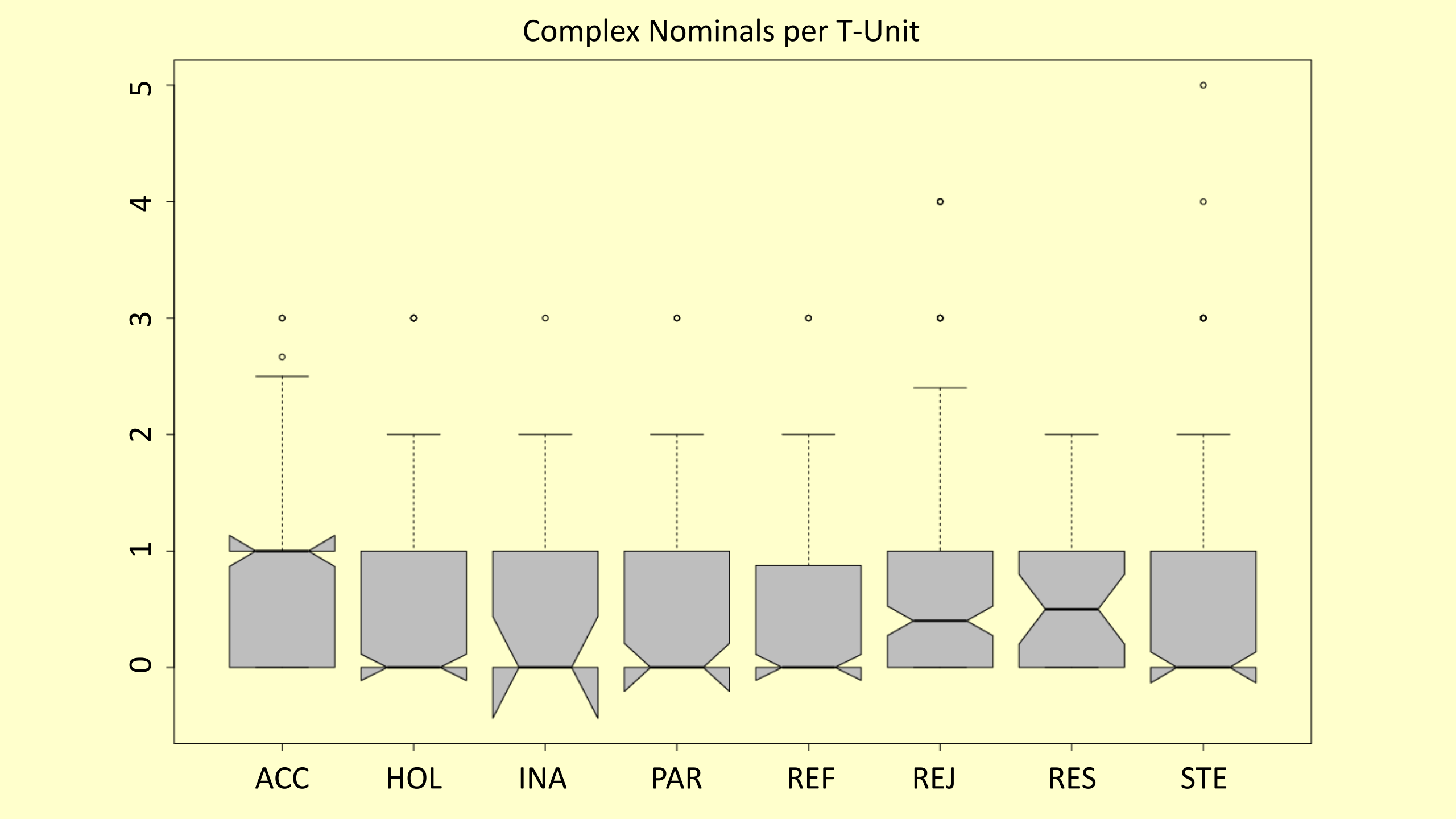
# What follows the strategy? Performance

- Fluency
  - Length of response
  - Reformulation ratio
  - Pause ratio
- Lexis
  - TTR
  - COCA Range
  - COCA Frequency
- Grammar
  - Grammar errors
  - Complex t-unit ratio
  - Complex nominals per t-unit

(after Iwashita et al., 2008)

https://www.linguisticanalysistools.org/tools.html

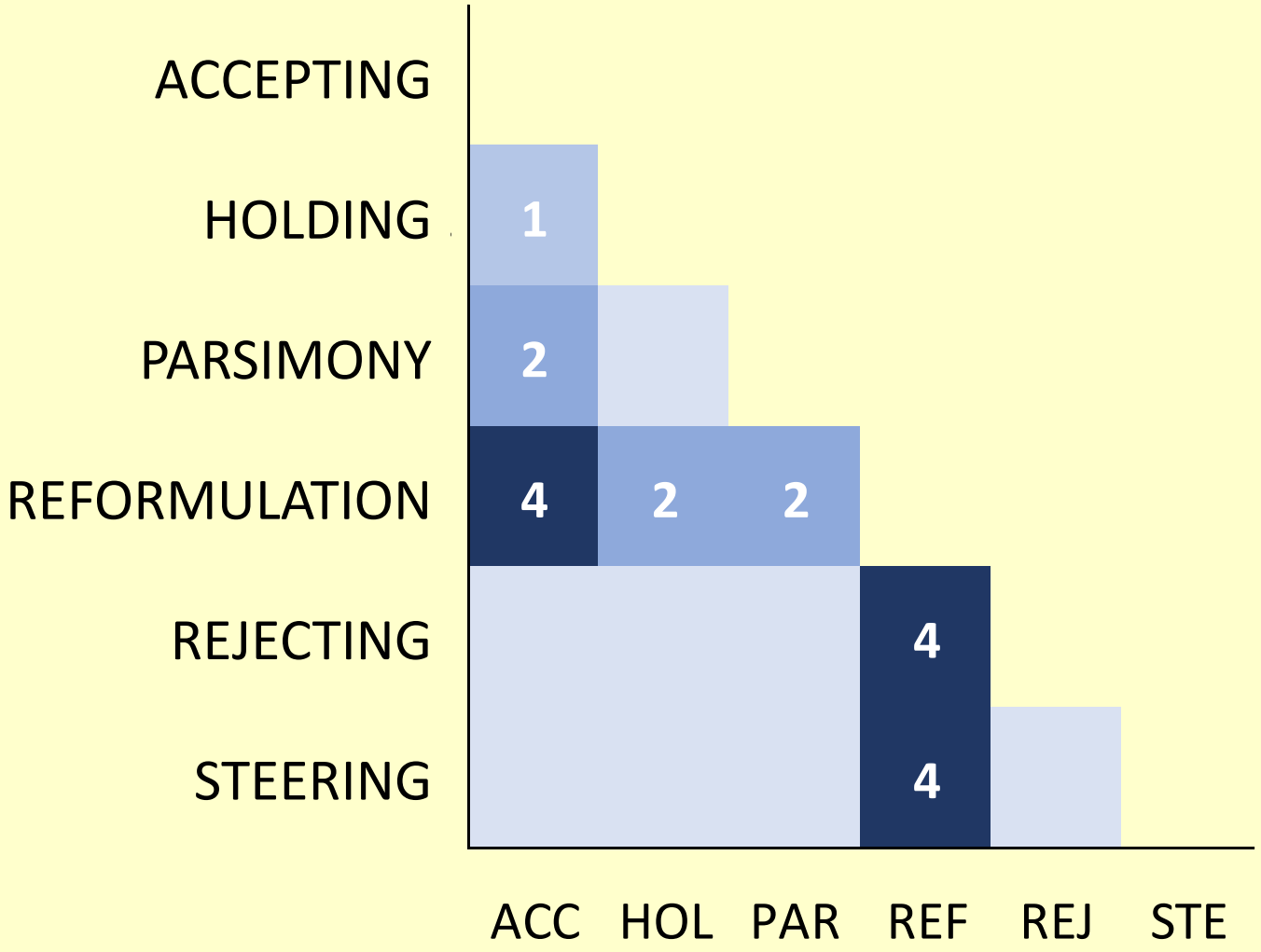

Reformulation Ratio
1.0
0.8
0.6
0.4
0.2
ACC
HOL
INA
PAR
REF
REJ
RES
STE


Complex Nominals per T-Unit
0
1
2
3
4
5
ACC
HOL
INA
PAR
REF
REJ
RES
STE

# Omnibus Kruskal-Wallis H Tests

| | $\chi^2$ | *d.f.* | *n* | *p-value* | | **Significant Pairwise Comparisons** | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Length | 34.458 | 5 | 508 | 0.000 | (sig.) | | REF-HOL | REF-STE | REF-REJ | REF-ACC | | |
| Reform Ratio | 26.465 | 5 | 508 | 0.000 | (sig.) | PAR-REF | HOL-REF | | | | | |
| Pause Ratio | 18.784 | 5 | 508 | 0.002 | (sig.) | PAR-REF | | STE-REF | | | | |
| TTR | 28.591 | 5 | 508 | 0.000 | (sig.) | | | | REJ-REF | ACC-REF | | |
| COCA Range | 7.239 | 5 | 508 | 0.203 | (n.s.) | | | | | | | |
| COCA Freq | 8.763 | 5 | 508 | 0.119 | (n.s.) | | | | | | | |
| Error | 11.295 | 5 | 508 | 0.046 | (sig.) | | | | | | | |
| Complex T | 34.101 | 5 | 508 | 0.000 | (sig.) | | | REF-STE | REF-REJ | REF-ACC | HOL-ACC | PAR-ACC |
| Complex Nom | 23.693 | 5 | 508 | 0.000 | (sig.) | | | REF-STE | REF-REJ | REF-ACC | | PAR-ACC |

# Significant Pairwise Comparisons



# Post-hoc Mann-Whitney U Tests with mean ranks and effect sizes

| Measure | Strategy 1 | Mean rank | Strategy 2 | Mean rank | *Z* | *n* | *p* | *r* | $R^2$ | Effect size (Cohen, 1988) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Length | REF | 102.88 | HOL | 78.12 | -3.199 | 180 | 0.001 | 0.24 | 0.06 | small |
| Length | REF | 79.53 | STE | 101.47 | -2.842 | 180 | 0.004 | 0.21 | 0.04 | small |
| Length | REF | 72.58 | REJ | 108.42 | -4.631 | 180 | 0.000 | 0.35 | 0.12 | medium |
| Length | REF | 70.32 | ACC | 110.68 | -5.213 | 180 | 0.000 | 0.39 | 0.15 | medium |
| Reform Ratio | PAR | 57.78 | REF | 85.27 | -3.990 | 148 | 0.000 | 0.33 | 0.11 | medium |
| Reform Ratio | HOL | 75.73 | REF | 105.27 | -3.950 | 180 | 0.000 | 0.29 | 0.09 | small |
| Pause Ratio | PAR | 59.46 | REF | 84.19 | -3.654 | 148 | 0.000 | 0.30 | 0.09 | medium |
| Pause Ratio | STE | 78.98 | REF | 102.02 | -3.165 | 180 | 0.002 | 0.24 | 0.06 | small |
| TTR | REJ | 75.41 | REF | 105.59 | -4.608 | 180 | 0.000 | 0.34 | 0.12 | medium |
| TTR | ACC | 76.28 | REF | 104.72 | -4.343 | 180 | 0.000 | 0.32 | 0.10 | medium |
| Complex T | REF | 80.12 | STE | 100.88 | -3.400 | 180 | 0.001 | 0.25 | 0.06 | small |
| Complex T | REF | 77.79 | REJ | 103.21 | -4.028 | 180 | 0.000 | 0.30 | 0.09 | medium |
| Complex T | REF | 74.48 | ACC | 106.52 | -4.925 | 180 | 0.000 | 0.37 | 0.13 | medium |
| Complex T | HOL | 77.87 | ACC | 103.13 | -3.767 | 180 | 0.000 | 0.28 | 0.08 | small |
| Complex T | PAR | 63.85 | ACC | 81.36 | -2.743 | 148 | 0.006 | 0.23 | 0.05 | small |
| Complex Nom | REF | 80.29 | STE | 100.71 | -2.968 | 180 | 0.003 | 0.22 | 0.05 | small |
| Complex Nom | REF | 79.21 | REJ | 101.79 | -3.241 | 180 | 0.001 | 0.24 | 0.06 | small |
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# Discussion

- HOLDING, PARSIMONY and STEERING elicit **less fluent responses** than REFORMULATING.

➢The goal of reformulating is to remove uncertainty

➢Holding increases cognitive load

➢Parsimony introduces uncertainty in an interactional context

➢Steering may introduce tension

# Discussion

- ACCEPTING, REJECTING and STEERING elicit **responses of greater grammatical complexity** than REFORMULATING and PARSIMONY (as measured by complex nominals per t-unit).

➢ Accepting, rejecting and steering generate the need for justification, questioning, or elaboration on the part of the candidate.

➢ Parsimony is intended to leave space for candidates' contributions.

➢ Space is not what is expected in an interactional context.

# Summary

- Grounded theory to explore spoken interaction
- Empirical quantitative analysis of candidate performance
- Examiner behaviour has an effect on candidate performance
- Improved understanding of the scope of the effect in an interactional context
- “The world cannot be understood without numbers, and it cannot be understood with numbers alone.  Love numbers for what they tell you about real lives.” – Hans Rosling

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# Questions?

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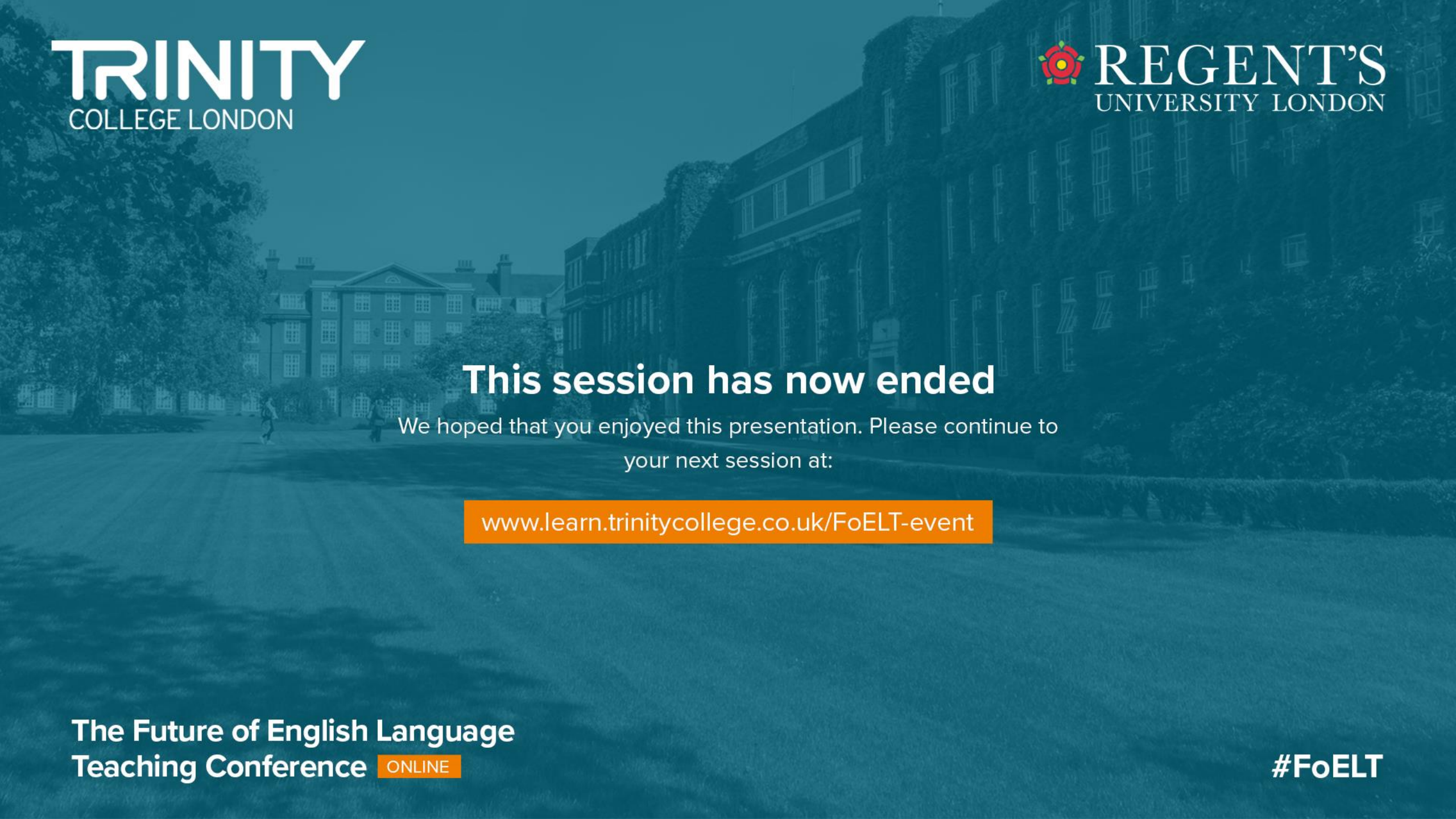
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