

Assessing second language pragmatic competence for intercultural communication: Test localisation and co-creation targeting UK pre-sessional students

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This presentation:

- 1. Second language (L2) pragmatic competence**
 - What is, and why L2 pragmatic competence?
 - L2 pragmatic competence & its assessment
 - What has been done & what still needs to be done?
 - L2 pragmatic competence in this project
- 2. Research questions & Research design**
- 3. Collaboration & co-creation with stakeholders**
- 4. The tasks**

1. Second language (L2) pragmatic competence

Very broadly, what is L2 pragmatic competence?

The ability to use the language appropriately considering the contexts, the interlocutors, and communicative goals (e.g., agree or disagree, request, decline).

Why is it important?

- 1. An essential component of L2 proficiency** in communication-oriented models of L2 proficiency (e.g., Bachman & Palmer, 1996, 2010; Canale & Swain, 1980; Purpura, 2004).
- 2. Governs the social and interactional dimensions of language use** (Taguchi & Roever, 2017; Timpe Laughlin et al., 2015).
- 3. Highly relevant to English for academic purposes** (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig et al., 2015; Youn, 2018).

L2 pragmatic competence & its assessment

The rationalist perspective:

The speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1975), politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), the theory of conversational implicature (Grice, 1975), and Purpura's (2004) model of language ability.

The discursive perspective:

Discursive pragmatics (Kasper, 2006, Roever, 2021).

The intercultural perspective:

Intercultural pragmatics (Kecskes, 2014, 2022; Liddicoat, 2022; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2020; McConachy, 2018).

Cross-cultural pragmatics

Focusing on measuring discrete points such as speech acts, implicatures, routine formulae using **DCTs (discourse completion tasks)**, **OPIs (oral proficiency interviews)**, **MCQs** (e.g., Brown, 2001; Hudson et al., 1992, 1995; Liu, 2006).

Focusing on more discursive, interactive and performance-based assessments using **monologic, dialogic role plays** (e.g., Roever, 2021; Taguchi & Roever, 2017).

Intercultural pragmatics

Performance in interpreting and expressing meaning; analysis of various elements that influence the performance; reflection on Self and Other in interaction (Liddicoat, 2022; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2020).

Remaining issues in assessing L2 pragmatic competence

1. **The standard of L2 pragmatic competence** considering global Englishes and intercultural communication (v.s. cross-cultural communication).
2. **Assessing skills that are more transferrable** to real-life settings and more reflective of language users' particular needs.
3. **Localise and operationalise the test:** construct coverage v.s. practicality in test administration and scoring; engaging stakeholders.

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Theoretical framework of L2 pragmatic competence in this project

- Meaning-oriented approach of L2 pragmatics (adapted from Purpura, 2004, 2017)
 - ➔ *pragmatic knowledge & use (functional and implicational)*
- Intercultural pragmatics (Kecskes, 2014, 2022; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2020; McConachy, 2018)
 - ➔ *metapragmatic awareness*

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→ *pragmatic knowledge & use (functional and implicational)*

Very briefly, functional knowledge & use: language functions, communicative goals
implicational knowledge & use: contextual,
sociolinguistic,
socio/intercultural,
psychological,
interactional.

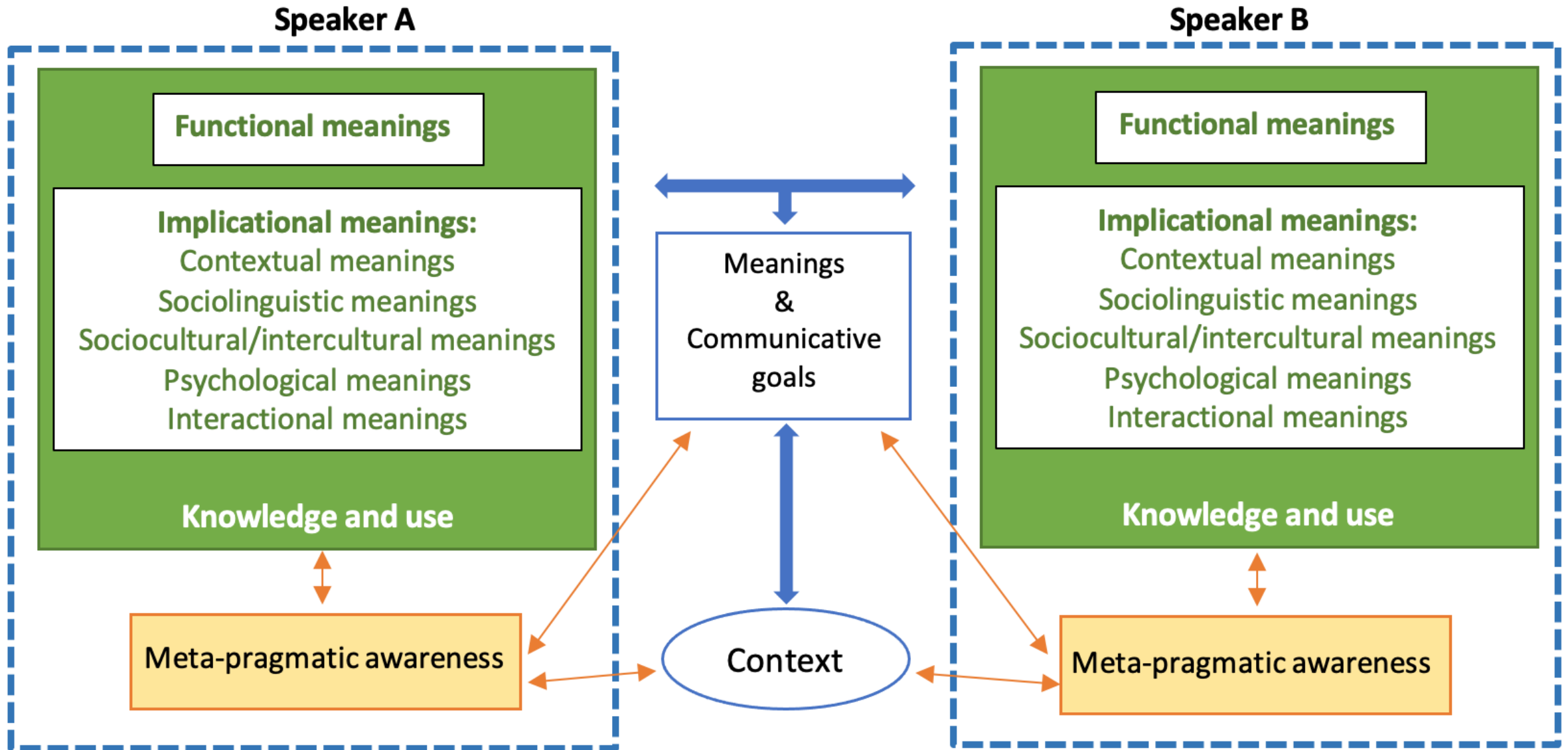
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 - ➔ *metapragmatic awareness*

Very briefly, metapragmatic awareness is:

- Awareness of multiple meanings
- Awareness of language use and effects
- Awareness of Self & Other; reflexivity

The Construct of L2 Pragmatic Competence for Intercultural Communication



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Research context: Pre-sessional students at UK universities

Pragmatic skills:

- Making a request (e.g., Halenko & Jones, 2011; Jordà, 2004)
- Understanding humour (e.g., Reershemius, 2012; Wang, 2014)

Pragmatic scenarios:

- Office-hour interactions (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 2005; Chiang, 2011; Skyrme, 2010; Young, 2013)
- Academic discussions (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig et al., 2015; Caprario, 2020)

Pre-sessional programmes:

Generally for students not meeting required English language proficiency test scores for degree programmes (Copland & Garton, 2011).

Pre-sessional students:

To be facilitated to better cope with academic communicative demands while studying at UK universities.

- A relatively more comprehensive needs of pragmatic competence in the US context (Youn, 2018) but not the UK context.
- The need to find out about L2 pragmatic competence in EAP in the UK context, esp. one under-researched EAP domain: **Pre-sessional programmes.**

Pre-sessional students progressing on to postgraduate programmes in the UK

The meaning of introducing the assessment of L2 pragmatic competence for intercultural communication to UK pre-sessional programmes

Positive washback in empowering teaching and enhancing learning

- Support students' effective communication
- Promote intercultural awareness (openness, flexibility, reflectivity)
- Address real-world needs (academic communication, holistic language development)
- Curriculum design (integrated teaching of language, culture, and communication strategies)

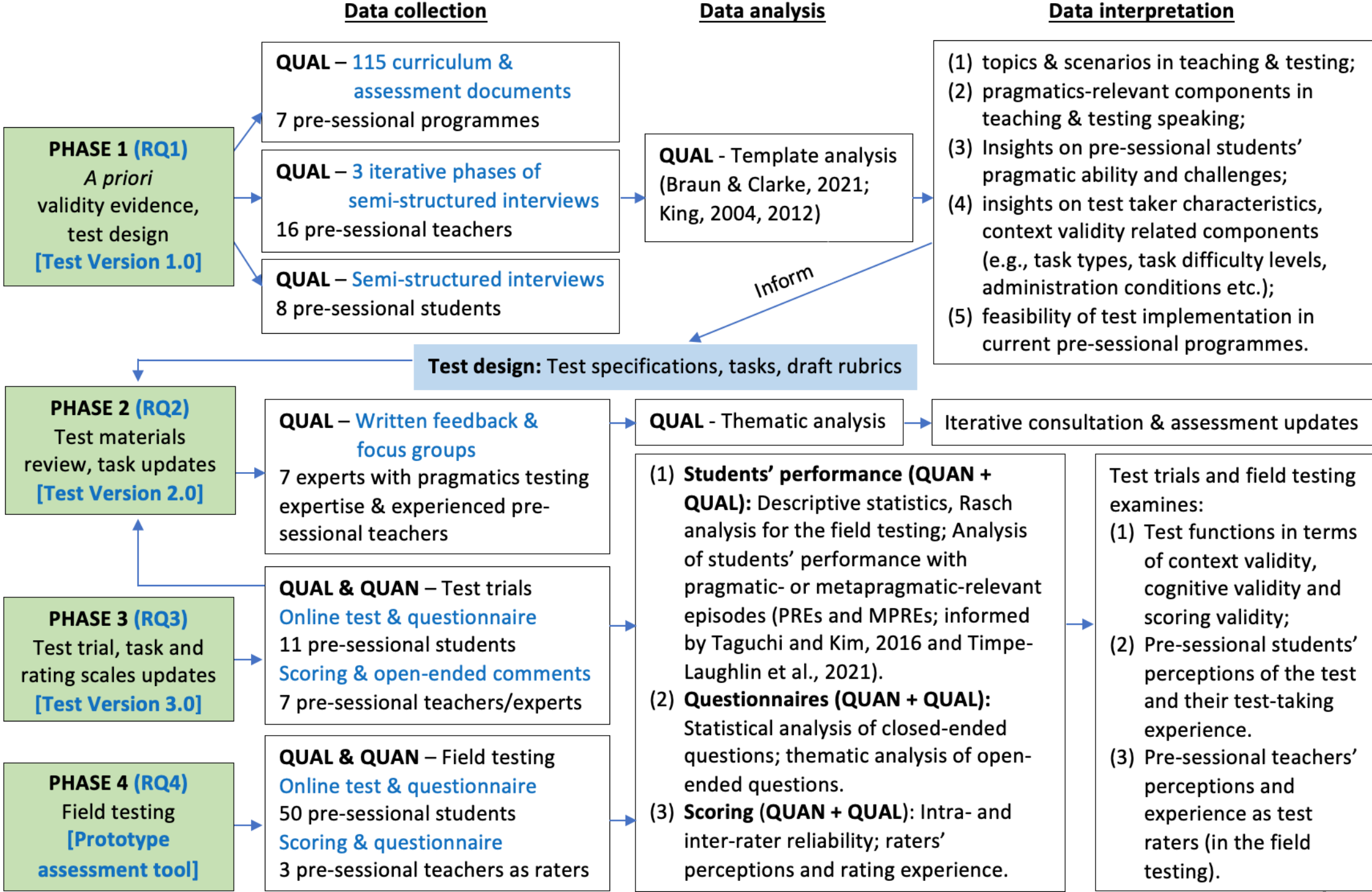
2. Research questions & Research design

Research questions (simplified):

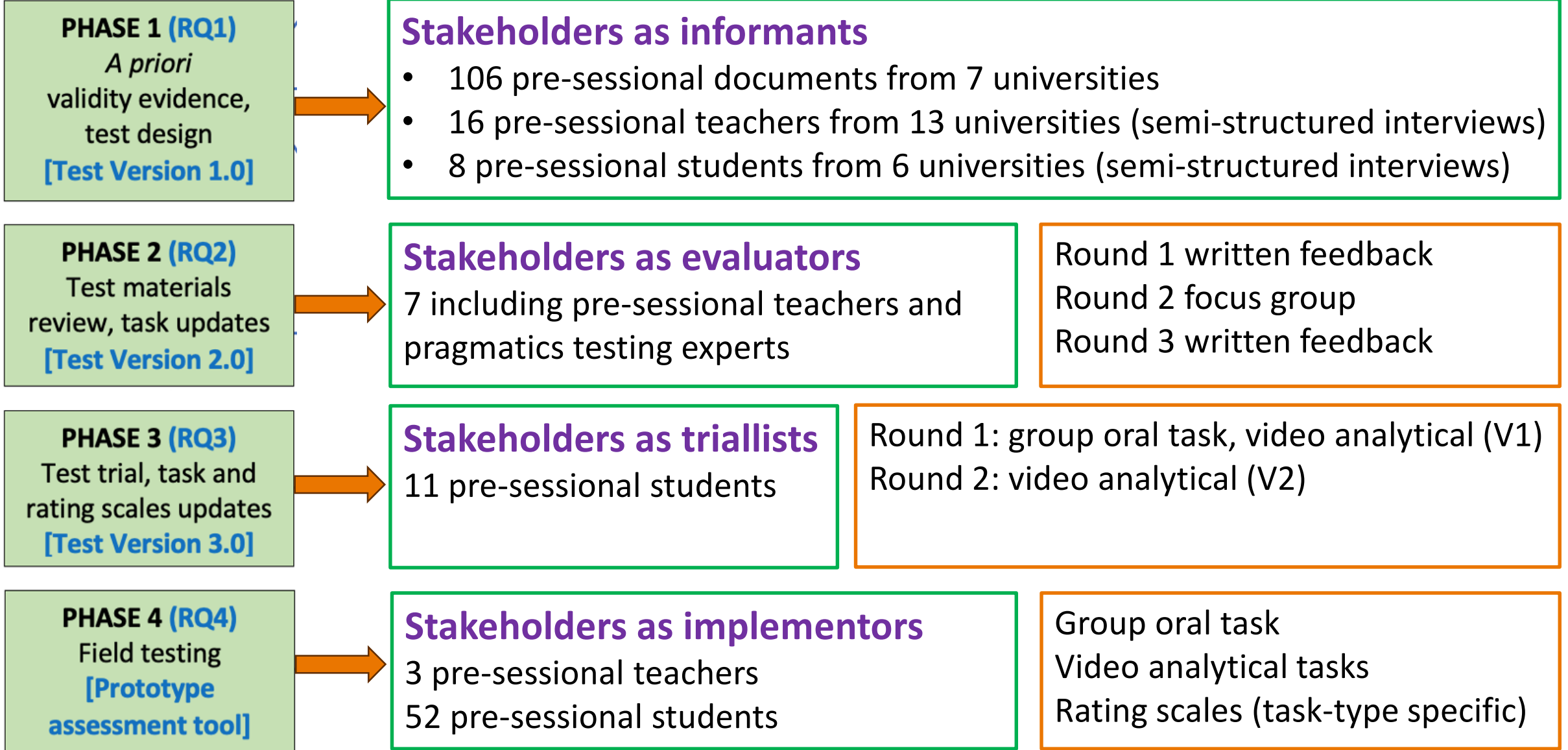
1. **Research question 1 (RQ1):** Initial evidence to inform test design
2. **Research question 2 (RQ2):** Test materials evaluation by pre-sessional teachers and pragmatics testing experts
3. **Research question 3 (RQ3):** Test trial (small-scale testing)
4. **Research question 4 (RQ4):** Field testing (larger-scale testing)

Research design

Mixed methods: a multi-stage exploratory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).



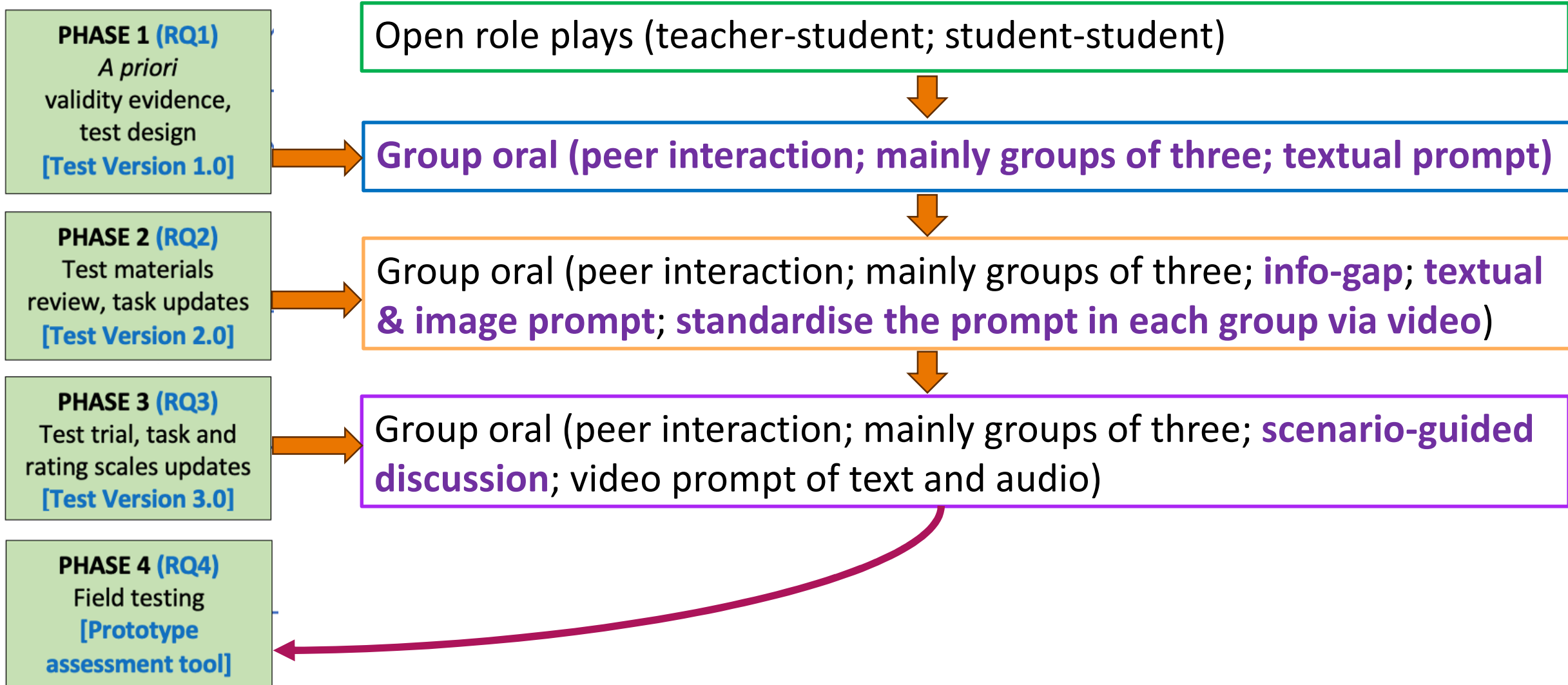
3. Collaboration & co-creation with stakeholders



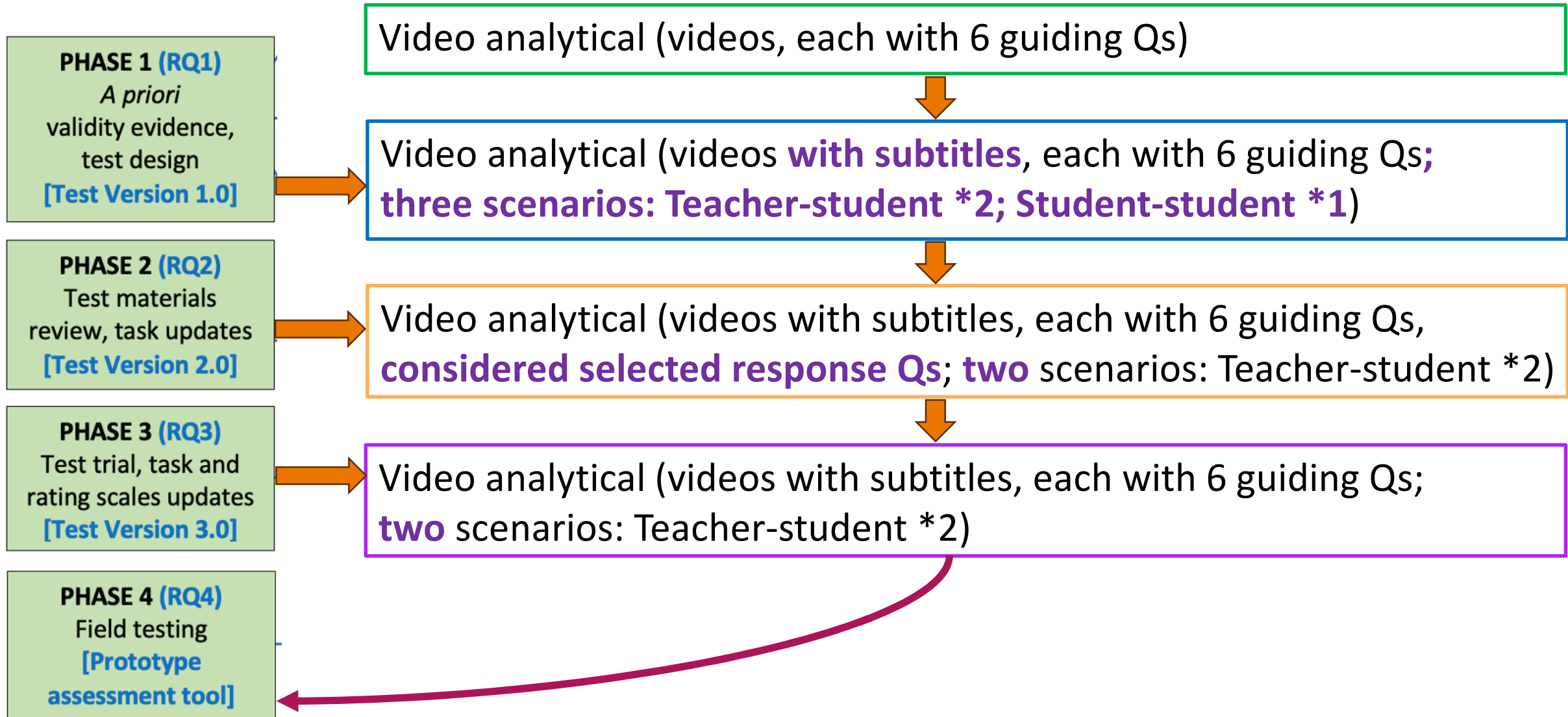
Examples:

How task types changed through the whole collaborative process

Group oral task: from 0 to 1



Video analytical tasks: from 0 to 1



4. The tasks

Task design (Test Version 3.0)

Group oral task (1 task, 10min)

- Targeting pragmatic knowledge and use.
- Peer interaction.
- Text prompt (in a format of a video with ElevenLabs generated audio of text; 2min preparation included).
- Mainly in groups of three (Nakatsuhara, 2009, 2011).
- Videoconferencing (Zoom).

Video analytical tasks (2 tasks, 20-30min in total)

- Targeting metapragmatic awareness.
- Teacher-student interaction.
- Video prompt: each video about 1.5min, filmed with two actors; each video has six questions (3 generic, 3 video-specific);
- Online platform (Qualtrics)
- A practice task: a video, one question with sample answer and answer tips, recording button for practice.
- Students video-record their answers (10-90s).

Group oral task

Scenario: You and your classmates have been assigned to work on a group project for your course. The project is a significant part of your final grade and is due in one week. Recently, one of your group members, Alex, has not been contributing to the project and has missed several meetings, which is impacting the project's progress.

Group task: In your group, complete the following tasks.

1. Briefly introduce yourself to your group (1-2 minutes).
2. Discuss the following points and make a group decision (7-8 minutes):
 - (1) How to talk to Alex about not participating and how it is impacting the project.
 - (2) How to express your concerns to Alex while explaining the importance of everyone contributing equally.
 - (3) How to encourage Alex to get more involved and meet the project deadlines.

Group oral task

Video analytical tasks



Two tasks with two scenarios of teacher-student interaction:

- Task 1 is the student ask the teacher for a recommendation letter
- Task 2 is the student try to negotiate mark of an essay with the teacher

Scenario 1: A conversation between James and Kate.

1. What is the relationship between the two speakers? Explain your reasons with examples of language and strategies from the conversation.
2. What was Kate trying to achieve in the conversation and did she achieve it? Explain your reasons with examples of language and strategies from the conversation.
3. Would this conversation take place in your own culture? If not, why not. If yes, would it differ in any way?

4. At the beginning of the conversation, Kate asked “Um, I’m just wondering are you, are you busy now?” What was her purpose of saying this? Explain your reasons.

5. James said “I see. So, Kate, I am incredibly busy these days, these weeks, to be honest. My schedule is packed, really really just very tight.” What did he mean by saying this? Explain your reasons.

6. Why did James say “OK, well, um, do you mind if I check my schedule?” (Think about what Kate has said/done.)

The “end product” of this project:

The prototype assessment tool

(To be integrated into existing speaking tests, some weighting of the speaking score)

1. Instructions on intended and cautions against unintended uses of the assessment
2. A group oral task assessing pragmatic knowledge and use, via videoconferencing (e.g., Zoom)
3. Two video analytical tasks assessing metapragmatic awareness, via online platform (e.g., Qualtrics)
4. Task-specific rating scales co-developed with pre-sessional teachers
5. An assessment/feedback reporting template for pre-sessional students.

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