Assessing, teaching and researching second language fluency

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L2 fluency workshop

1. How to assess fluency?
   - Perceived fluency
   - Utterance fluency

2. How to improve fluency?
   - Skill acquisition perspectives (PPP)
   - Interactionist perspectives (TBLT)

Based on my teaching/research experience and dataset…
2012-2015 Tokyo, Japan

Assistant Professor at Waseda University
My anecdotal story:

I was in charge of the English curriculum for 1000+ “Freshman” students:

- Highly motivated (for study and work-abroad)
- Background: 6 years of EFL education (without enough conversational opportunities) from Grade 7
- Taking several hours of English lessons per week
- Few opportunities to use L2 English outside of classrooms

Goal: Enhancing L2 comprehensibility!
Too much focus on form!
I invited some of these students to participate in a weekly L2 learning project (30min × 10 weeks)
Kazuya’s L2 speaking project

30 Japanese students

Week 1
Pre-tests

Week 2
Orientation

Weeks 3-11
XXXX activities
(30min × 9 sessions)

Weeks 12
Post-tests
Some positive results:

Pre-test
Comprehensibility (401)

Post-test
Comprehensibility (677)

(0 = difficult to understand, 1000 = easy to understand)
Some positive results:

Pre-test
Comprehensibility (102)

Post-test
Comprehensibility (388)

(0 = difficult to understand, 1000 = easy to understand)
Resulting in several publications...


Question 1

• How did the students’ comprehensibility improve (*better pronunciation, vocab, grammar*)?

Question 2

• What kinds of activities did Kazuya do with his students?
Question 1
How did their comprehensibility improve? Did any specific aspects of their speech (e.g., pronunciation, vocab, grammar) become better?

Focusing on better pronunciation or lexicogrammar? What should be prioritized?
Results (Global skills)

Proficiency

Pre-test  Post-test

Comprehensibility

Accentedness
How can we analyze L2 speech?

- Pronunciation
  - Segmentals
  - Word stress
  - Intonation
  - Speed
  - Breakdown
  - Repair
  - Diversity
  - Sophistication
  - Appropriateness
  - Accuracy
  - Complexity

- Fluency

- Vocabulary

- Grammar
Results (Subskills)

- **Fluency** (quick)
- **Pronunciation** (gradual, slow)
- **Lexicogrammar** (constant)

Proficiency

**FOCUS OF TODAY**
How to assess fluency?
Background

- Fluency is defined as the optimal, smooth and fluid delivery of L2 speech (Segalowitz, 2016).

- Different from pronunciation/lexicogrammar accuracy and complexity

- Fluency explains approximately 50% of variance in L2 oral proficiency (e.g., comprehensibility) (see Derwing et al., 2004; Kang et al., 2010).
Key references


Let’s listen to a L2 speech sample, and discuss how to assess its fluency!
A Japanese learner of English (ID101)
A freshman student @ Waseda

QUESTIONS: How can we measure her “fluency”? According to your own analysis of fluency, is she a fluent speaker? If so, why and how so?
Perceived Fluency (subjective)

- A 9-point scale: (1 = Dysfluent, 9 = Fluent)
According to my native speaking judges in London...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Judge</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average Score: 6.6

(***1 = Dysfluent, 9 = Fluent)
Utterance fluency

Speed
- No. of syllables/words per minute including/excluding silence

Breakdown
- No. of filled pauses (eh, ah, oh) & unfilled pauses (silence, 250ms) divided by a total number of words

Repair
- No. of repetition & self-correction divided by a total number of words

These measures are uniquely tied to certain stages of L2 speech production processes…
L2 Speech Production Model (Kormos, 2012)

Conceptualization

Formulation
1. Lemma retrieval
2. Morphological encoding
3. Phonological encoding

Monitoring

- Final-clause pauses
- Mid-clause pauses
- Repairs
- Articulation rate
Steps for Utterance Fluency Analyses

(1) Check the no. of **words/syllables** by submitting transcripts to (http://www.wordcalc.com/).

- There is a table on the drive way, it’s rain.
- Three guys are playing guitar and they are praying folk music.
- There are a few crowds in the blue sky uh load is uh going to somewhere.

38 words, 39 syllables
Steps for Utterance Fluency Analyses

(2) The total number and duration of filled pauses (ah, eh, oh, umm) can be calculated via transcripts.

- There is a table on the drive way, it’s rain.
- Three guys are playing guitar and they are praying folk music.
- There are a few crowds in the blue sky uh load is uh going to somewhere.

2 filled pauses
Steps for Utterance Fluency Analyses

(3) Any silence more than 250ms should be counted as “unfilled pauses”.

Check a waveform (via Praat)
Automatic silence detection

Phonation time: *Praat*

>>Annotate
>>To TextGrid Silence
>>Set to the following condition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silence threshold</th>
<th>-35.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum silent interval duration</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum sounding interval duration</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent interval label</td>
<td>Silent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounding interval label</td>
<td>sounding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Automatic silence detection

There is a table on the drive way, [PAUSE] it’s rain.

Three guys are playing guitar and they are praying folk music.

There are a few crowds in the blue sky uh Road is [PAUSE] uh going to somewhere.
Steps for Utterance Fluency Analyses

(4) Check if filled/unfilled pauses occurred within clauses or between clauses

- There is a table on the drive way. [UPfinal] It’s rain.
- Three guys are praying guitar and they are praying folk music.
- There are a few crowds in the blue sky. Uh [FPfinal] Road is [UPmid] uh [FPmid] going to somewhere.

No. of filled pauses within/between clauses (1, 1)
No. of unfilled pauses within/between clauses (1, 1)
Steps for Utterance Fluency Analyses

(5) **Phonation time (sec)** can be calculated (i.e., “total length” minus “all unfilled pauses”). Then, divide the no. of syllables by the phonation time (sec) to calculate **articulation rate** (no. of syllables per sec)

Total phonation time: 11.85 (excluding any silence > 250 ms)
Total no. of syllables = 39

Articulation rate = 3.29 syllables per sec
Key references


Question 2
What kinds of activities can be facilitative of L2 fluency development?

- Anecdotal stories?
- Research evidence?
1. Skill acquisition perspectives
(let’s get it right from the very beginning)
Automatization of declarative knowledge

• L2 learners increase the control over what they have partially acquired.

• They need to practice the L2 in relatively familiar and easy tasks repetitively under communicative pressure in order to increase their fluency and control over what they have already learned.

(see DeKeyser, 2012)
Research Evidence

De Jong & Perfetti (2011)

Fluency Training in the ESL Classroom: An Experimental Study of Fluency Development and Proceduralization

Nel de Jong
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Charles A. Perfetti
University of Pittsburgh
Research Evidence

Thai & Boers (2016)

Repeating a Monologue Under Increasing Time Pressure: Effects on Fluency, Complexity, and Accuracy

CHAU THAI
University of Danang
Danang, Vietnam

FRANK BOERS
Victoria University of Wellington
Wellington, New Zealand
Fluency Activity: 4-3-2

My most unforgettable trip was…

4 min

My most unforgettable trip was…

3 min

My most unforgettable trip was…

2 min
2. Interactionist perspectives
(let’s first use language for meaning & get it right in the end)
My research project: Google Hangouts Project

A credited language-exchange course between Waseda (Japan) and Georgetown (US)

Japanese learners of English

American learners of Japanese
Saito & Akiyama (2017)

**When?**
- 2014 Fall

**Who?**
- 15 students at Waseda (L2: English)
- 15 students at Georgetown (L2: Japanese)

**How?**
- Via weekly conversation exchanges using a video-conferencing tool (i.e., Google Hangouts) over one academic semester
Treatment

1. Scheduling sessions with much flexibility using own computers

2. Visual-based conversation in English (30min)
   - Choosing two photos on weekly themes (e.g., pop-culture, sports)
   - Providing discussion topics for each photo

3. Visual-based conversation in Japanese (30min)

4. Report the date/time to the researcher
Negotiation for Comprehensibility

1. To promote incidental FonF, NS interlocutors were encouraged to provide conversational (rather than didactic) recasts.

2. Reformulating NNSs’ utterances, when they perceived certain linguistic errors as the potential danger of successful communication in the future.
THANK YOU!!