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Aspects of Fluency and Accuracy

par

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***La**boratoire **I**nter-Universitaire de **R**echerche en **Di**dactique des **L**angues*

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Créé en 1989, LAIRDIL est un laboratoire inter-universitaire de recherche de l'Université Toulouse III et de l'INSA, rattaché à l'IUT A. Il a pour objet la recherche en didactique des langues. Les travaux sont principalement axés sur l'étude de l'apprentissage des langues en autonomie. La diffusion des résultats de cette recherche est une priorité.

Chaque année, LAIRDIL organise un cycle de séminaires-conférences sur des sujets de pédagogie ou de didactique susceptibles d'intéresser un grand nombre d'enseignant(e)s d'anglais, voire d'autres langues. La conférence constitue la première partie d'une brochure sur ce thème. Les membres du laboratoire et d'autres personnes ajoutent leurs réflexions propres sur le sujet abordé. Le tout est édité dans une brochure.

La conférence n° 5, *Aspects of Fluency and Accuracy***,** a été donnée le 16 janvier 1995 par James Dean Brown, enseignant à l'Université de Manoa (Hawaï) et auteur de nombreux livres et articles en didactique des langues.

Autres séminaires :

- *The Problems of Oral Testing. What Did you Say?* par Mike Nicholls, 25 novembre 1993.
- *Autonomous Learning of Vocabulary Through Extensive Reading,* par James Coady, 27 janvier 1994 .
- *Film, TV and Videotapes in EFL,* par Richard Cooper, 31 mai 1994.
- *Maximizing the Value of Jigsaw Activities,* par Stephen Gaies, 6 mars 1995.
- *Ten Top Principles in the Design of Vocabulary Materials,* par Michael McCarthy, 1 juin 1995.
- *Spécial recherche,* par J. D. Brown et S. Gaies, les 16 janvier et 6 mai 1995.

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Aspects of Fluency and Accuracy

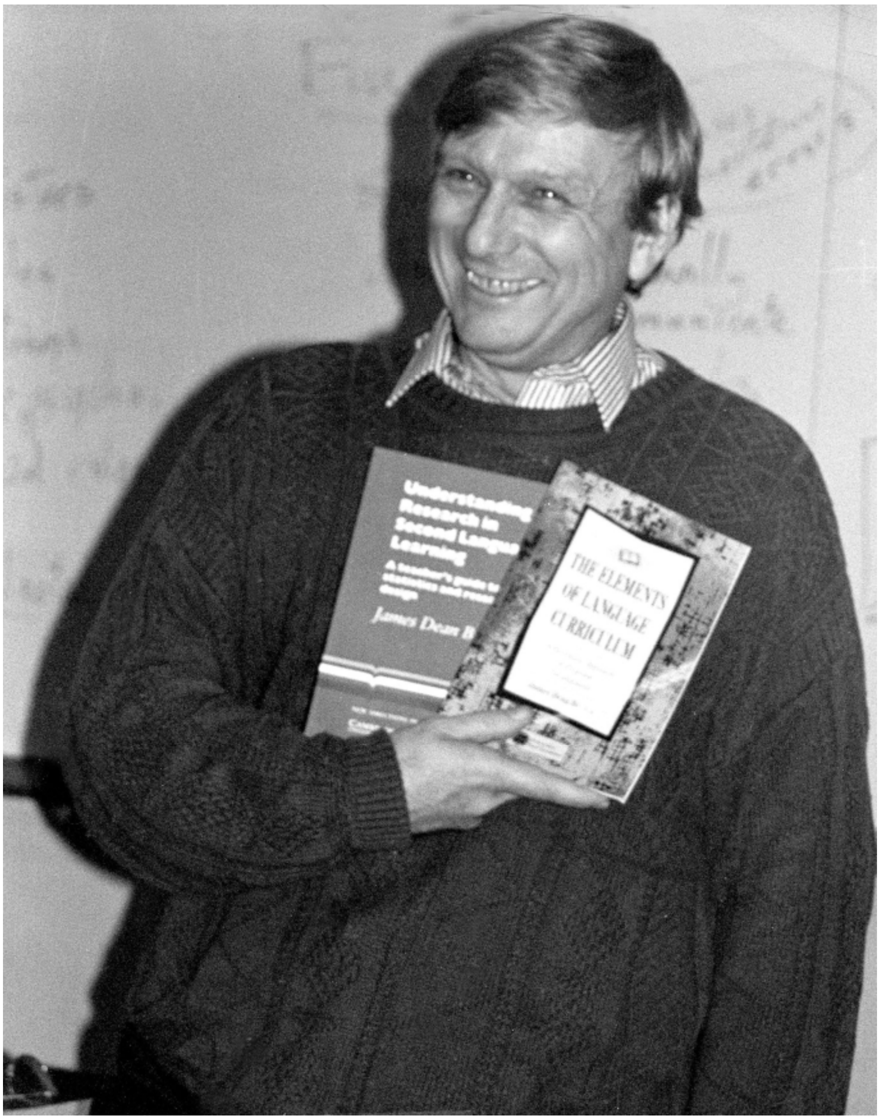
Abstract

The introduction of this paper explores a number of different definitions of "fluency" and its apparent antithesis, "accuracy." The paper then goes on to suggest ways that the language teaching profession's view of fluency should be expanded to include a wider array of linguistic tools that students must be able to use, a variety of choices that students must be able to make and an assortment of strategies that they should eventually be able to use to compensate for the fact that they lack full knowledge and fluency in the language.

In more detail, to improve fluency, students must have certain linguistic tools that go well beyond the knowledge of pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary that most teachers provide their students. Students must also be able to use (a) suprasegmental, (b) paralinguistic, (c) proxemic and (d) pragmatic tools to their advantage. In addition, to increase their fluency, they must learn to make linguistic *choices* that have to do with (a) settings, (b) social, sexual, and psychological roles, as well as (c) register and style. There are also six linguistic *strategies* that will help students increase their fluency, that is, the abilities: (a) to use speed to their advantage, (b) to use pauses and hesitations efficiently, (c) to give appropriate feedback, (d) to repair competently, (e) to clarify effectively, and (f) to negotiate for meaning when necessary.

Finally, teachers can do at least five things in their classrooms to foster fluency: (a) encourage students to make errors, (b) create many opportunities for students to practise, (c) create activities that force students to focus on getting a message across, (d) assess student's fluency not their accuracy and (e) talk to the students about fluency.

This paper concludes by noting that fluency is not an absolute issue where a student either has it or doesn't have it. Rather, fluency is a matter of degrees. Hence, some degree of fluency can probably be attained at all levels of ability. Given this state of affairs, students should gradually be acquainted with the linguistic tools, choices and strategies they will need to communicate fluently, regardless of the level of language proficiency they may have at the moment.



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Aspects of Fluency and Accuracy

Introduction

According to Hartmann and Stork (1976, p. 86), "A person is said to be a fluent speaker of a language when he can use its structures accurately whilst concentrating on content rather than form, using the units and patterns automatically at normal conversational speed when they are needed."

Fillmore (1979) proposed four kinds of fluency:

1. the ability to fill time with talk (*i.e.*, to talk without awkward pauses for a relatively long time);
2. the ability to talk in coherent, reasoned, and "semantically dense" sentences (the quotes are Fillmore's);
3. the ability to have appropriate things to say in a wide range of contexts;
4. the ability to be creative and imaginative in using the language.

Notice that Fillmore's notion of fluency is limited to oral productive language. This issue will be discussed in more detail later.

For Brumfit (1984, p. 56), fluency is "to be regarded as natural language use." He also summarizes Fillmore's four kinds of fluency saying that they are related to four characteristics: speed and continuity, coherence, context-sensitivity, and creativity. These characteristics, he argues, are related to four "basic sets of abilities" as follows: psycho-motor, cognitive, affective and aesthetic (p. 54).

Richards, Platt and Weber (1985, p. 108) define fluency as "the features which give speech the qualities of being natural and normal, including native-like use of pausing, rhythm, intonation, stress, rate of speaking, and use of interjections and interruptions. They go on to say that, in second and foreign language situations, fluency characterizes a level of communication proficiency, which includes the abilities:

1. to produce written and/or spoken language with ease;
2. to speak with a good but not necessarily perfect command of intonation, vocabulary and grammar;
3. to communicate ideas effectively;
4. to produce continuous speech without causing comprehension difficulties or a breakdown of communication (Richards *et al*, 1985, pp. 108-109).

Lennon (1990, p. 388) argues that fluency has been used in the literature in two senses, which he labels the broad and narrow senses. To him, the broad definition functions "as a cover term for oral proficiency", which "represents the highest point on a scale that measures spoken command of a foreign language" (p. 389). He goes on later to define the narrow sense as being "one, presumably isolatable, component of oral proficiency. This sense is found particularly in procedures for grading oral examinations..." (p. 389).

Schmidt (1992) prefers to describe fluency as an *automatic procedural skill* (after Carlson, Sullivan & Schneider, 1989). He argues that L2 fluency is a performance phenomenon which "depends on procedural knowledge" (citing Faerch and Kasper [1984]) or knowing how to do something, rather than declarative knowledge or knowledge about something.

According to Richards *et al.* (1985, p. 109), fluency can also be understood in contrast to accuracy, "which refers to the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences but may not include the ability to speak or write fluently". Traditionally, accuracy has been taught and demanded not only in syntax, as suggested by Richards *et al.*, but also in the areas of pronunciation and vocabulary. Of course, pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary could easily be included in the notion of grammar if Richards *et al.* are using grammar to refer to a sort of all inclusive big "G" Grammar. I feel that fluency can best be understood, not in contrast to accuracy, but in complement to it. As Brumfit (1984) put it, "In no sense is it (accuracy) meant to imply that fluent language may not also be accurate language".

The above definitions furnish a good starting point because they include much of what fluency is. However, in my view, a full understanding of fluency must take into account many other factors - factors which will be discussed in this paper.

Expanding our view of fluency

My experiences in trying to teach or foster fluency in my students have led me to believe that, if we want to help our students become more fluent, we must expand or reshape our views of fluency to include three crucial elements. I will call these three elements tools, choices and strategies.

First, students must be given access to all of the *tools* of the effective communicator in any language. Mere knowledge of pronunciation, syntax, and vocabulary will not suffice because these are only three of the tools that are available to people when they communicate. Nobody relies as heavily on carefully pronounced words and grammar to communicate as L2 learners do. Certainly, native speakers use a much wider range of tools including suprasegmentals, paralinguistics, proxemics and pragmatics.

Second, acquisition of fluency depends on the students having an expanded and complete picture of the *choices* that they must make to accurately communicate in their L2. Which choices they will make will depend primarily on the settings in which communication is taking place, as well as the social, sexual, and psychological roles of the interlocutors and register and style involved in the discourse.

Third, because 100 percent accuracy is only a long range goal, and because a certain degree of fluency can probably be attained at all levels of accuracy, students must learn *strategies* to help them communicate fluently with whatever level of language they have at the moment.

In short, I feel that teachers must expand the traditional boundaries of accuracy to offer rules of appropriacy including knowledge of the tools that they must be able to use, the choices that they should be able to make and the strategies that they must use to compensate for the fact that they lack full knowledge and fluency.

Tools

As mentioned above, teachers can foster fluency in their students by giving them access to all of the *tools* of an effective communicator. Given what we now know about language, just giving students knowledge of pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary only provides them with three of the available tools. Teachers who are aware of recent developments in applied linguistics will be in a position to offer their students a much wider range of tools including knowledge about (a) suprasegmentals, (b) paralinguistics, (c) proxemics and (d) pragmatics, as well as practice in their use.

Suprasegmentals

Suprasegmentals are aspects of pronunciation which extend beyond the individual phoneme, or segmental level. In other words, suprasegmentals typically involve more than one phoneme. Those aspects of language which are often listed as suprasegmentals in English are stress, intonation and voice quality. These elements are important in their own way because they are important for understanding the language produced by others, as well as for expressing oneself. To illustrate, consider the fact that an utterance like, "You are looking very nice tonight", can be said in a matter-of-fact manner, sincerely, sarcastically, suggestively, sexily and probably many other ways, depending on stress, intonation, and voice quality. In other words, the same pronunciation, syntax, and vocabulary can mean a variety of things depending on stress, intonation and voice quality - the suprasegmentals.

Paralinguistics

Paralinguistic features are those aspects of the spoken language that are outside of the vocal system. Some of the commonly listed paralinguistic features are facial expressions, eye movements, eye gaze, head movements and hand gestures. These are important communication tools and most humans use them. Interestingly, these are the tools that many of us use when all other forms of communication break down, as in situations where we do not speak the language at all. Hence, use of these features may be one of the strategies that learners can use, when other linguistic tools break down, to keep communication moving along.

Proxemics

Proxemic aspects of a language have to do with the use of the body in communication. Thus, the communicative aspects of distance, touching and posture during communication would all be proxemics. Proxemics are important because they can be used to communicate friendliness, concern, hostility and many other complex emotions without complex pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary. They are equally important because the misuse of proxemics in intercultural situations can cause serious misunderstandings. Over the years the most salient example of proxemic miscommunication has been provided by my many male Saudi and Kuwaiti students who have stood very close to me (oh, my goodness) and even touched me (horror of horrors) in violation of the rules of proxemics of my own linguistic and cultural group, North Americans.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics involves those aspects of the language that have to do with the particular contexts and situations in which the language is produced. Thus the relationships between real world knowledge and the language being used in a particular context would be pragmatics. Likewise, the relationships between speaker and listener in that context would be pragmatics. This would be a simple issue if the pragmatic rules of all languages were the same, but like all other aspects of language, large differences in pragmatics exist between languages (and cultures): differences that can cause communication problems, differences that can be taught and learned and differences that must be understood if fluency is ever to be improved.

Pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary revisited

We must also recognize that even our views of pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary teaching may be limiting our students' options.

For instance, in *pronunciation*, we tend to focus on segmentals (the smallest units of distinctive sound) to the exclusion of suprasegmentals, but also to the exclusion of very important and useful generalizations about pronunciation itself, like the fact that unstressed vowels in English become *schwa* in many environments and like the fact that incorrect word stress is far more likely to cause incomprehension among native speakers than incorrect production of segmentals. We also largely ignore the many forms of reduction that occur in rapid spoken English. Why is it that we do not teach these things? And why is it that we are amazed when our students cannot understand natural spoken language like *whenarwegonnagedoudahere*? (When are we going to get out of here?) (For more on this topic, see Brown & Hilferty, 1986, 1987, 1989 & forthcoming).

Similarly, our view of *syntax* may be antiquated and limiting our students' options. Consider the notion of requiring our students to use complete sentences. While that may be appropriate for teaching writing, at least formal writing, it is not appropriate for teaching speaking. It is a fact that the syntax of spoken discourse does not require complete sentences. Indeed, complete sentences will sound strange to native speakers. Consider the following imaginary conversation between a native speaker (NS), who does not use complete sentences, and a non-native speaker (NNS), who does use complete sentences just like he was taught:

NS *Howzit goin'?*
NNS *I am doing very well, thank you.*
NS *Your family?*
NNS *They are doing very well, too, thank you.*
NS *Whereya going?*
NNS *I am walking to the snack bar. Would you like to come with me?*

Wouldn't it be much more natural (and fluent) for the rules of conversational pronunciation and syntax to be used as follows?

NS *Howzit goin'?*

NNS *Fine, thanks.*
NS *Your family?*
NNS *They're good, too.*
NS *Whereya goin'?*
NNS *The snack bar. Ya wanna come along?*

First, notice how the second conversation uses the syntax of spoken colloquial English, which *does not* prescribe complete sentences, but rather organizes itself around *utterances*.

Second, note that several of these utterances appear to be chunks of language (*e.g.*, "Howzit goin'?" and "Fine, thanks.") that could/should be taught as units (as contrasted with sentences constructed on the basis of syntax rules from vocabulary items). Finally, note, in the second dialog, that the pronunciation is reduced and somewhat more relaxed (and appropriate).

Lastly, our view of *vocabulary* may be old-fashioned and limiting our students options. Why is it that we avoid idioms? Truly fluent speakers must have command of the vocabulary and idioms of the language. Also, why is it that we never teach the swear words and "vulgar" expressions? These types of vocabulary are part of the language (see Claire, 1990) and for students (men and women alike) to function in some of the most relaxed and informal language styles fluently, they must have a command of this vocabulary, too.

Big "G" Grammar

In short, the Grammar (in the big "G" sense of that term) that we offer to our students should indeed include pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary, but only in their expanded and full versions if we want to offer students the full range of even these three tools. In addition, this Grammar should include suprasegmentals, paralinguistics, proxemics and pragmatics if we wish to give our students the full range of tools that they will need to increase their fluency.

The answer that I often get to these observations is that the students will pick up these things after they get to the country. If that argument is satisfactory, perhaps we can assume that students will "pick up" all aspects of the language once they get to the foreign country, if given enough time. Why would we want to send partially informed humans into these situations? People with only three out of the seven sets of language tools available to them and incomplete views of even those three tools.

Isn't the purpose of studying a foreign language to make the process of language learning more efficient and less painful (in advance of actually needing the new language for real-life communication)? If so, then how can we justify not giving our students the full range of tools that they will need in their grammar in order to be fluent and effective communicators? From a practical point of view, it may not matter that these tools are theoretically sound and important tools prerequisite for achieving fluency, because the bottom line for the teacher may be that students find these topics interesting. Try some of these topics and see if the students don't find them interesting

1. Differences between L1 and L2 in how stress, intonation and voice quality are used to affect meaning.
2. Differences between L1 and L2 in how facial expressions, eye movements, eye gaze, head movements and hand gestures are used .
3. Differences between L1 and L2 in distance, touching and posture during conversation.
4. Differences between L1 and L2 in the pragmatic rules of conversation in different contexts and situations, as well as the rules related to the relationship(s) between speaker and listener.
5. The importance of *schwa* in English pronunciation.
6. The importance of word stress in native speaker comprehension of non-native speech.
7. The importance of reduced forms in comprehending native English speech.
8. The importance of using and understanding utterances (rather than complete sentences) in spoken English.
9. The importance of learning some aspects of English as chunks rather than as vocabulary items and syntax rules.
10. Idioms as important elements of vocabulary in English. Swear words and vulgarisms in English.

If I am correct, incidental to providing students with the tools they will need to become fluent in English, teachers can introduce topics that will make their classes more interesting to the students than the standard triad of pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary.

Choices

As mentioned above, the acquisition of fluency probably depends on the students having an expanded picture of the *choices*, or options, that they have when they are communicating. To me, that goes well beyond the mere knowledge of pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary that most teachers give their students and even beyond the suprasegmentals, paralinguistics, proxemics and pragmatics that I argued for in the previous section. Widdowson (1978, p. 13) made a distinction between what he called reference rules and expression rules. *Reference rules* would be those rules that make up the student's knowledge of the language. Given the foregoing discussion, a student's reference rules would consist of what they know of the pronunciation, syntax, vocabulary, suprasegmental, paralinguistic, proxemic and pragmatic rules of

English. The *expression rules* would be those rules that determine what the student actually does with the language.

Thus the choices that students make when they communicate in the language must be based on reference rules. These reference rules often center on (a) settings, (b) social, sexual and psychological roles and (c) register and style.

Settings

The place where communication takes place is the setting. Settings vary considerably. Consider the following limited list and how they might affect the way anyone would speak: a classroom, a gym, a gas station, a dentist's office, a grocery store, a library, a movie house, a large meeting of 250 people, a small meeting of seven people, etc.

Such settings are important linguistically because they can affect the way language is produced, that is, the choices the speakers make in terms of pronunciation, syntax, vocabulary, suprasegmental, paralinguistic, proxemic and pragmatic rules. For instance, a person talking conversationally outdoors will generally speak louder and more effusively than a person speaking in a library. Or, a person who is lecturing to a large university class is likely to speak quite differently than the same person working with a kindergarten class.

Sexual, psychological and social roles

Within various situations, sexual, psychological and social roles may further determine the choices that people make in communicating.

Sexual roles have to do with differences between males and females in terms of how they communicate with other males and females. The research indicates that females and males communicate differently in general. For instance, it has been found that females speak less often and less long in faculty meeting settings than males in American universities. In addition, females speak differently to males than they do to other females and males speak differently to females than they do to other males. These are differences that learners must take into account when making linguistic choices.

Psychological roles have to do with differences based on personality, aggressivity, dominance, power relationships, etc. For instance, a small, passive, powerless person will speak to a large, aggressive, powerful person differently than to another small, passive, powerless person. Thus very different linguistic choices may be based on psychological roles.

Social roles have to do with differences based on the relative status of the different roles in society of the people who are communicating. We all take on a variety of social roles in our lives. For instance, in my personal life, I am a father, son, uncle, friend, ex-husband, boy-friend, etc. In my work, I am a friend, colleague, professor, administrator, employee, committee chair, committee member, etc. In my daily life, I am also a customer at a bank, grocery store, auto garage, drug store, dentist's office, doctor's office, etc. In some roles, I may be rather humble and meek, for instance, when I take my car in for servicing, I know nothing about mechanics and feel rather powerless so my linguistic choices are those of a humble, meek customer.

Register and style

Over the years, some confusion has arisen over the definitions and use of the terms register and style.

Register will be used here only to refer to differences in language based on membership in different occupations (*e.g.*, ministers, professors, students, mechanics, sportscasters, etc.) or different hobbies or interest areas (*e.g.*, fishing, skating, skiing, model railroading, computer hacking, etc.). Membership in any of these groups certainly involves the use of special vocabulary and may involve other modifications in syntax and even pronunciation. For instance, Protestant ministers definitely use a register that involves special vocabulary (*e.g.*, Baptism, Host, Holy Trinity, salvation, sermon, etc.), syntax (*e.g.*, "thy will be done", "hallowed be thy name", etc.) and will even sometimes use a special stentorious pronunciation while delivering a sermon.

Style will only refer to differences in level of formality, perhaps ranging from very formal to formal to colloquial to casual to very casual. These differences in style occur because of differences in settings, differences in social, sexual and psychological roles and differences in register. However, style can also vary within any of these categories, based on the degree of personal relationship between the interlocutors. For instance, a minister might move from very formal style during the sermon, where personal relationships are distant, to more colloquial while greeting parishioners at the door of the church after the sermon, to very casual while greeting a particularly close friend at that same door - all the while using the minister's register such that everyone is well aware of the roles involved.

Making correct choices

Being able to switch registers and styles and responding correctly to different social, sexual and psychological roles in various settings is one mark of a fluent speaker of any language. Yet, often we fail to help our students to learn the various rules involved in these choices. Naturally, such rules will be more important when the students are at a relatively advanced level of learning. However, I believe that we can start teaching the students some aspects of these rules much earlier if we really want to.

Strategies

As mentioned earlier, fluency is not an absolute characteristic which a student either has or doesn't have. Rather, fluency is a matter of degrees, so some degree of fluency can probably be attained at all levels of accuracy. Given this state of affairs, students should probably be taught specific linguistic *strategies* to help them communicate fluently with whatever level of language they have at the moment. There are at least six such linguistic *strategies* that will help students to become increasingly fluent. These six are the abilities: (a) to use speed to their advantage, (b) to use pauses and hesitations efficiently, (c) to give appropriate feedback, (d) to repair competently, (e) to clarify effectively and (f) to negotiate for meaning when necessary.

Ability to use speed to their advantage

Lay people, when asked to define fluency, will often talk about fluency being speed. But fast speech is not necessarily fluent speech. Indeed, fluent native speakers differ in the speed of their speech. It may in fact be that non-native speakers of English will try to use speed to make themselves seem more fluent and, in the process, simply demonstrate their inability to speak quickly with any success. The point is that fast speech, whether native or non-native, is not necessarily fluent speech. This is a message that may be important to get across to students: it is okay to speak relatively slowly as long as it is done appropriately. In fact, native speakers often speak at a rather slow rate so they will have time to think as they talk and so they will be clear to their listeners. Hence, the appropriate speed is the speed at which the speaker can think cogently and still get his/her message across clearly.

Ability to use pauses and hesitations

Native speakers pause and hesitate often while they are talking. In fact, second language learners must be made to understand that natives spend up to 50 percent of their speaking time pausing, so pausing and hesitating must be signs of fluency. (For more on pauses, see Clark and Clark, 1977; Hatch, 1983; or Tarter, 1986). Because students often will not believe that natives pause and hesitate, the teacher may want to audiotape (or better yet, videotape) some native speakers talking in a natural situation *(i.e.*, not actors) in order to show students how natives actually do hesitate and pause. In one way or another, students must be shown that pausing and hesitating are necessary and natural parts of spoken language. Human beings need time to think, and they use pauses to accomplish that.

However, students must also recognize that using a slower speed with pauses and hesitations may require the use of fillers. Fillers are sometimes just sounds like *uh*, *uhm*, *er*, *ah* and *mm*; other times, fillers may be words such as *okay*, *well*, *you know* and so forth. Whether the filler is a sound or word, the purpose is to avoid silence, which in turn makes the communication more natural - and fluent. Native speakers of English will hesitate and pause, but they will not allow long silences to build up. Instead, they appropriately use fillers to avoid long silences and in the process give themselves time to think.

Ability to give appropriate feedback

Feedback includes all signals that one speaker directs at another to indicate general success or failure to communicate. Feedback may express understanding or misunderstanding, agreement or disagreement, comprehension or confusion, etc. And the signals that are used to express these meanings can include gestures, facial expressions, sounds and words. Gestures might include a hand signal to stop or continue or talk faster or head signals like nods of agreement, head shaking in wonder, etc. Facial expressions could involve quizzical expressions, smiles, winks, direct eye contact, etc. Sounds might include grunts of agreement, sounds like *uh huh*, *mm*, etc. Words that are often used to give feedback are things like *yep, yeah, okay, really*, etc. Using all of these feedback mechanisms differs from language to language and even dialect to dialect. Hence, students cannot be expected to "pick them up" easily. These feedback cues should be taught because they are clear and obvious markers of fluency that can make a person seem very foreign or very fluent.

Ability to repair competently

Native speakers often mispronounce words, create false starts, back track, stutter and so forth. In the process, they feel nothing akin to the mortification that some non-native speakers feel when they make such "mistakes." In part, the natives handle their mistakes better because they know how to competently repair them. Repairs are used during conversations to correct errors and misunderstandings. When speakers correct themselves, it is called self-repair. When one speaker corrects another it is called other-repair. Students need to learn how to correct their own errors, how to understand and accept corrections from others and perhaps eventually how to correct others.

Ability to clarify effectively

One type of repair that is particularly important is clarification. When a fluent speaker recognizes that the listener is not understanding (through facial expressions or verbal cues), that speaker will be able to clarify effectively through rephrasing, defining terms, summarizing or drawing a picture if necessary. The point is that, when misunderstood, fluent speakers will use whatever strategies are necessary to make the message clear.

Ability to negotiate for meaning when necessary

Similarly, when fluent speakers recognize that they are not understanding, they will use whatever facial expressions or verbal cues are necessary to get the speaker to clarify. And if they are still not understanding after the speaker clarifies, the fluent speaker will continue to seek clarification. This process of give and take in conversation (including all aspects of repair, feedback and clarification) is known as negotiation. Typically, the effort is focused on negotiating meaning, but that is not always the case. Negotiation can also involve vocabulary, grammar or even pronunciation.

Fostering fluency

In my view, fluency can only partially be "taught" in the traditional sense of that word. Certainly, we can expand our students' knowledge base in terms of choices, tools and strategies but, at a certain point, I think that we have to realize that the teaching of fluency will be different from other types of teaching, that is, to teach fluency we must be willing to let go, to let the students do the work, to set up situations in which fluency will be fostered and then encourage communication.

Unlike other aspects of language learning, fluency has to do with automaticity. As Schmidt (1992) put it, fluent speech is automatic, not requiring much attention and is characterized by the fact that the psycholinguistic processes of speech planning and speech production are functioning easily and efficiently (Lennon, 1990, p. 391). Such automaticity can only be achieved by the students themselves, and we can only help the students by creating opportunities for them to increase their own fluency.

My experiences in teaching speaking in China and elsewhere indicate to me that achieving ease and efficiency in speech production can be fostered by teachers if they (a) encourage students to make errors, (b) create many opportunities for students to practise, (c) create activities that force students to focus on getting a message across, (d) assess students' fluency not their accuracy and (e) talk to the students about fluency.

Encourage students to make errors

Many students may be hampered in their efforts to become fluent by the fact that they concentrate so ferociously on the accuracy of their syntax. Especially in some of the Asian countries that I have worked in, students are afraid of making mistakes because they do not want to "lose face" in front of their peers. Making errors is therefore a topic that I have had to teach to my students. To do so, I have used three strategies: (a) explaining native speaker error patterns, (b) minimizing error correction and (c) treating error making as a skill that students must master.

Explaining native speaker error patterns

Non-native speakers seldom recognize that native speakers make errors as a natural part of using language, especially in spoken language, including syntactic errors of subject, verb agreement, article agreement, tense, etc., pronunciation errors, errors in lexical choice and even logical errors. Normally, native speakers who are talking together don't even notice such errors unless they interfere with the communication. And when interference does occur, various strategies are used by both interlocutors and the conversation proceeds on its way. The students most likely do these things in their own native language. It may therefore prove useful to point these facts out to them and suggest that they listen to their own verbal production and that of other native speakers of their mother tongue to see if it isn't true in their language.

Students may not be close enough observers of linguistic phenomena to notice such errors in native production. So, another strategy that native speaker teachers can use to help convince students that such errors exist is for the teachers to monitor their own production when in front of their classes and point out to the students occasions when they make mistakes, or backtrack and self correct, or hesitate, or repeat a word, etc. For non-native speaking teachers, it may be necessary to tape live native speech wherein such errors occur and play that back to the students so they can become aware that even native speakers make errors.

The point of all this, of course, is that the students need to be convinced that it is okay for them to make production errors, indeed, it is a natural part of all communication, even among native speakers. The odd thing from my point of view is not that natives make errors (I have observed that for years), but rather that non-natives think that they must produce error-free complete sentences in spoken language. If this is part of the belief system of the students, it can only be destructive because they are bound to fail: they can be no better than native speakers and native speakers fail to use 100 percent correct grammar in complete sentences. If students are ever to increase their fluency, they must understand that they are placing expectations on themselves that are much higher than the expectations that native speakers place on themselves. I often ask my students, "What makes you think that you can speak English better than me, a native speaker?" That never fails to make them laugh, but like most humor, this question has an important grain of truth in it that is not lost on most of the students.

Minimizing error correction

If a teacher wants to encourage students to take a chance on making errors, it is absolutely necessary that error correction be kept to a minimum. At least in situations where the teacher wants students to increase their fluency, error correction should probably be limited to those errors which interfere with communication. The students will in all probability have their hands full dealing with the errors that they are monitoring in their own speech production without the teacher adding to their problems.

In some sense, the students' task is to bring their production of the language up to the knowledge of the language that they already have. For students to do that effectively, they need to be left alone to gradually bring their productive skills up to at least an approximation of their linguistic competence. "Fluency, then, can be seen as the maximally effective operation of the language system so far acquired by the student" (Brumfit, 1984, p. 57). The point is that teachers should not yank the students back to focusing on accuracy (by doing too much error correction) during periods of fluency development because that will bring the whole process to a halt.

Treating error making as a skill

If students can be convinced that error making is a natural part of language use, and that their job is to learn how to make errors appropriately, then they will have some hope of becoming fluent. What subskills must the students develop in order to strengthen their error-making skill? First, they must learn that making errors is a necessary part of making progress toward fluency. Second, they should learn that errors are a natural part of their language development, not an indication of their lack of worth as human beings. Third, they must develop a willingness to make errors. A student who is afraid to make errors won't make errors and a student who won't make errors won't become fluent. For many students, this may mean learning to take chances in ways that they have never done before.

Create many opportunities for students to practise

In addition to encouraging students to make errors (in constructive ways) teachers may want to provide students with ample opportunities to practise using the language. In other words, the students must be induced to practise all aspects of the language so they become comfortable with using whatever expanded set of tools they have at the moment.

As a profession, we tend to provide this practice in "conversation" courses. However, my experience with conversation courses is that 90 percent of the time is spent with the teacher talking and the students listening and 10 percent dedicated to students talking. Thus in a 50 minute class, five to ten minutes might be dedicated to students actually talking. Since that five to ten minutes is often spent in teacher-student interactions (one student at a time), the time must be divided by the number of students in order to calculate the amount of time that students actually spend talking. Thus in a small class of ten students, each one might get thirty seconds of precious language production time. Of course, the time would be considerably reduced in a "conversation" class of 20 students, not to mention the "conversation" classes of 30, 40, 50 or 60 students that I have seen in some countries.

To create classes where students get much more practice producing language, we have to create "speaking" courses which, by definition, mean that teachers must shut their mouths and set up activities which involve many students talking at the same time. Such strategies are difficult for many teachers. We are often much more comfortable in a teacher-centered (*i.e.*, very controlled) situation. In addition, student-centered activities take a lot of careful planning. In other words, it is easier to run a "conversation" course than a "speaking" course, but we owe it to our students to create "speaking" courses where they can get the practice they so sorely need to increase their fluency.

The central issue in creating "speaking" courses is that teachers must also learn how to relinquish their control of the class. For the many teachers who were themselves educated in a system where teachers were the center of every class, it is difficult to set up student-centered activities like pair work, group work, role plays, etc. and then simply let the students go. As one student put it (with reference to how I handle group work), "You look like a caged lion roaming aimlessly around the room while students are doing group work." For many of us, letting go in this sense is not easy.

Part of the solution to this problem is that teachers should give themselves a purpose in all student-centered activities - perhaps as a cultural informant, source of vocabulary, sympathetic listener, etc. Perhaps the teacher will simply move from pair to pair or group to group, not doing error correction but rather encouraging students to focus on their messages and stop worrying about accuracy and making errors. The main point is that, while designing activities, teachers should not only plan what the students will be doing, but also plan how the teacher will fit into the activity.

I also find that creating a relaxed classroom atmosphere helps foster fluency among the students. Naturally, the atmosphere of any class is a function of the personality of the teacher and the group dynamics in a particular class. However, I believe that any teacher can work on and improve the atmosphere in class by using humor, songs, personal interactions, smiles, cartoons, etc. to create a more fun and relaxed place for learning to take place.

Create activities that focus on a message

When I was teaching fluency in China fifteen years ago, it was necessary to create almost all of our activities from scratch. Fortunately, nowadays, teachers have numerous resources to fall back on (for instance, see Sadow, 1982; Klippel, 1987; Fried-Booth, 1988; Ladousse, 1988; Bailey & Savage, 1994). Whether selecting fluency activities from sources like those just listed, or in creating activities for a specific situation, teachers should keep in mind that all fluency activities should focus the students on getting their meaning across.

In China, our intermediate level speaking course provided a series of role-play, pair-work and group work activities (including panel presentations, debates, problem solving, etc.) that afforded the students ample opportunities to practise specific functions of the language in relatively non-threatening environments. Because the advanced level speaking course was designed to prepare students for university seminar-type situations, we tended to focus on group work and individual presentations to the group.

Regardless of which specific types of activities are chosen, they should all be constructed so that students have some specific task to perform or a clearly defined goal to reach. Although we did not know it at the time, we were using a task-based approach and those tasks were designed to maximize the degree to which students were focused on getting their meaning across. In other words, long before task-based curriculum had a name, we were doing it in China just to keep the students focused on their message rather than on the accuracy of the language they were using.

Assess student's fluency not their accuracy

Even when teachers address the issue of fluency well, if they test the students' accuracy rather than their fluency at the end of the course, they will have trouble getting the students' trust and cooperation in the future. Whether we like it or not, students are very test-driven. If we test them using multiple-choice grammar tests, they will prepare for multiple-choice grammar tests and wonder why on earth we are doing pair work in class. If on the other hand, the test involves role plays, pair work, interviews, etc., the students will prepare for such testing activities. Students are not stupid. They will prepare for the test and we must use that energy to guide them into practising what we want them to practise.

To create tests that reflect the types of things we want the students to practise throughout the semester, we must think about what it is that we want them to be able to do at the end of the course. Once we know what we want them to be able to do, we must then design achievement tests that allow the teacher to observe whether or not the students can indeed do those things and to what degree they have achieved those abilities.

In the intermediate speaking course in China, we tested the students in interviews, not with multiple-choice grammar tests, but with interviews. Our course objectives were that the students should be able to effectively use 15 of the functions covered in the Gambits series (Keller & Warner, 1979) by the end of the term. The content of the test was based on the specific objectives of our course. Clearly, we wanted to develop an oral performance test. In this case, we needed a test of the students' abilities to perform the 15 functions that we were teaching.

In the end, the speaking teachers decided collectively that the test should be a taped interview, and that the interviews should be a sort of role play, where the students were supposed to be students in the United States and the teacher was supposed to be a professor in their field. We wanted five minute interviews, and to save time, at the beginning of each interview, we asked the student to choose three cards from among fifteen (one for each objective). Each card had a number of questions and/or situations that would elicit the function that was being tested by that card. The interviewers used each card until they felt that the students had been given an adequate chance to show what they could (or could not) do with the function in question, then moved on to the next card. No scoring was done while the interview was being conducted. However, the interviews were tape-recorded so that scoring could be done later.

At different times during the program, various schemes were used to score these interviews but the clearest scheme asked two teachers (the student's own teacher and one other) to give the students separate ratings for fluency, content, effectiveness in communicating their meaning, correct choice of exponents to accomplish the function and stress/intonation. Each of these five categories was given a total of five points possible for a total of 25 points. Notice that our testing scheme made no effort to rate grammatical or phonological accuracy, but instead focused the students on getting their idea across fluently.

In our advanced speaking course, the final projects were speeches that the students had to give in front of the other students and a video camera. Students were not allowed to read the speeches, though they could talk from an outline, and they were graded down if we felt that they had memorized the talks.

The topics were selected by them (with teacher approval) from their major field of study. They were told to find topics that would be informative and interesting to the other scientists in the audience. The students had been taught how to make effective speeches throughout the term. We hoped that the intrinsic interest of the topics to the speakers and their desire to really communicate their ideas to their fellow scientists would help them to stay focused on meaning and not worry too much about accuracy.

In order to make the experience as realistic as possible, some students in the class were given role cards during each presentation. The card might say, "ask a rude question", or "disagree with the speaker on some point", or "interrupt the speaker rudely to make a point of your own", etc.

In addition to watching themselves on videotape, students were rated on content, organization, speaking effectiveness (eye contact, gestures, voice projection, etc.), handling of the audience and intonation/stress. Notice again that we wanted them to worry about everything but accuracy. We wanted the students to be so focused on getting their meaning across in an effective public speaking manner, that they simply didn't have time to worry about grammatical accuracy. And, in general, the speeches were remarkably fluent.

Mendelsohn (1992) provides a similar set of observation/scoring criteria that teachers might consider adapting for their own purposes. Mendelsohn also leaves issues of grammatical or phonological accuracy out (allowing space for the teacher to write in notes, but not directly addressing accuracy in the feedback process).

The point is that the tests in a speaking course must be used to shape how the students view and practise the language. (For more on how tests can be used in language programs, see Brown 1990.) Certainly, developing good fluency-focused communicative tests is difficult and administering such tests is hard work and can be time consuming. But creating sound communicative tests is no more difficult than developing good fluency-focused communicative teaching materials. Why would anyone even consider testing such a curriculum in any other way? The message that a test sends to the students can totally defeat the teacher's efforts in the classroom unless there is a very close match between what is being taught and what is being tested. In other words, how the teacher assesses or tests in a course will affect how students see fluency, both in terms of what it is and how important it is.

Talk to the students about fluency

Unfortunately, students do not always agree with such teaching methods. For instance, early in the development of our program in China, the students complained that they couldn't learn from other students (in pair work, group work, etc.) and that they preferred for the teacher to lecture on the finer points of grammar in English (suggesting that perhaps we should watch our Chinese colleagues to learn how it should be done). Convincing the students that our way of teaching was useful and even valuable to them became an important part of our jobs.

We began by talking to them about their test scores, pointing out that they had high scores in grammar, but relatively low ones in the other skill areas of reading and listening (which, we noted, actually required them to do something with the language). We also pointed out that they lacked the ability to write with any fluency or speak fluently. So, we strongly encouraged the students to stop worrying about grammar and grammatical accuracy and focus instead on increasing their fluency.

In addition, we began to explain to them what we were trying to accomplish in terms of developing their abilities to use speed to their advantage, to use pauses and hesitations efficiently, to give appropriate feedback, to repair competently, to clarify effectively and to negotiate for meaning when necessary. We also shared with them why we were encouraging them to make errors, creating many opportunities for them to practise, creating activities that forced them to focus on getting a message across, assessing their fluency not their accuracy and why we were talking to them about fluency. In short, we were honest with them about our intentions, we were respecting their ability to comprehend what we were trying to do and we were soliciting their feedback. These strategies seemed to work quite well.

There were also three stories that I told repeatedly to make several points about fluency. One story was about how students perceive the learning of fluency, another one was about the benefits of becoming fluent and the third story was about how fluency applies to skills other than speaking.

Story one: Student perceptions of fluency learning.

At the end of the first thirty-week cycle (about 900 hours of instruction) in our China program, one angry student approached me in the hallway and said, "I think you should know that this program is a terrible program. We don't learn anything. You have too much testing and you don't teach us anything."

A crowd of apparently like-minded students was gathering; they were nodding in agreement with the outspoken student. I was surrounded with my back against a wall and I was beginning to worry. The outspoken student continued, "You should study how the Chinese teachers teach English. You could learn a lot from them. You should teach the building blocks of language: grammar and vocabulary. Then we would learn a lot."

A sudden inspiration made me ask a single question, "Do any of you really think that you could have made these complaints and argued your point this well thirty weeks ago? Do you think you would have had the fluency? We have taught you fluency, my friends, and you could not have gotten that from a grammar book. I want you to think about that."

The point is that fluency acquisition may go completely unnoticed by students or, at best, they will think that they did it for themselves, without help from their teachers. I think they are wrong, that is, I think that students will have great difficulty acquiring fluency, especially in an EFL setting, unless teachers set up situations (*e.g.*, pair work, group work, problem solving, etc.) in which students can actually practise using the language - situations that may be antithetical to the grammar-translation methods that many students think of as appropriate language teaching. I repeated this story many times to illustrate these points to my students.

Story two: The benefits of becoming fluent.

Toward the end of the third ten-week term, one of the students went to a conference in North America in his particular scientific field. When he returned, he was very excited. He had apparently gone to a talk by a professor in his specialization that he admired greatly. At one point, he had raised his hand and used the polite interruption function that we had taught him to ask a question. Apparently, it was a very good question because later that same professor stopped him and asked him if he would like to have a cup of coffee. By the time they were finished with their coffee, the student had been promised (and indeed later got) a scholarship to do two years of graduate study at a very prestigious American institution.

This story became a standard story that I told our Chinese scientists to convince them that they really must learn fluency in English at all costs. Their colleague would never have gotten the scholarship, so the story went, if he had passively sat in the audience without asking any questions or if he had been unable to converse over coffee with that particular professor. I always put a heavy emphasis on the amount of money involved, which was the equivalent of a lifetime's worth of salary in the PRC, because I realized that the PRC Chinese are among the best capitalists in the world.

Whenever I told this story, my focus on fluency suddenly seemed to make sense to the students and I miraculously got a great deal more cooperation in doing pair-work, group-work and other communicative activities. Apparently, money can be a great motivator even in language learning.

Story three: The benefits of becoming fluent.

Toward the end of the first term in the China program, I was explaining the directions for a pair work activity when one of the students raised his hand and said, "Teacher, teacher, please to speak more slowly." I turned to him and said, "No, my friend, you listen more quickly." I have often thought about that moment. In trying to make a joke, I had hit on what may be a truth about the nature of listening comprehension: it is the listener's responsibility to learn to listen more quickly, or fluently, rather than the speaker's obligation to speak more slowly (and unnaturally). It struck me that fluency might not be just a speaking skill issue, but also related to the listening skill.

In the months that followed, our program expanded this notion. We modified our teaching in the listening course and then in reading and writing courses, as well, based on the notion that fluency is a necessary component of all four skills. I have no question in my mind that these insights served our students well. Lennon (1990) appears to agree, at least in terms of the writing skill, when he states:

> Theoretically, the idea of fluency could be extended to writing. Indeed, some foreign language learners are certainly more fluent writers than others. But for some reason little value is placed on written fluency in language teaching; although, in terms of the uses to which L2 writing will be put by many language learners professionally, it is probably a vital need. (p. 391)

The point is that the acquisition of fluency is often thought of as being related only to the speaking skill. I often used this story to illustrate to my students that fluency is probably involved in all four skills. But that is a topic for another paper.

Conclusion

In sum, this paper argued that, in addition to the traditional linguistic tools of (1) pronunciation, (1) syntax and (3) vocabulary, students must also learn to use four new sets of tools in their second or foreign language:

4. suprasegmentals
5. paralinguistics
6. proxemics
7. pragmatics.

Students should also learn to make linguistic choices based on the following three sets of factors:

1. settings
2. social, sexual and psychological roles
3. register and style.

And students can learn six linguistic strategies that will help them to increase their fluency, including the abilities to:

1. use speed to their advantage
2. use pauses and hesitations efficiently
3. give appropriate feedback

4. repair competently
5. clarify effectively
6. negotiate for meaning when necessary.

Finally, to foster fluency, teachers can do five things in their classrooms:

1. encourage students to make errors
2. create many opportunities for students to practise
3. create activities that force students to focus on getting a message across
4. assess student's fluency not their accuracy
5. talk to the students about fluency.

This paper has repeatedly argued that fluency is not an absolute issue which students either have or don't have. Rather, fluency is a matter of degrees and some degree of fluency can probably be attained at all levels of language ability. Given this state of affairs, students should gradually be acquainted with the linguistic tools, choices and strategies they will need to communicate fluently, regardless of the level of language proficiency they may have at any particular moment.

James Dean Brown

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Extraits de la conférence de James Dean BROWN
Fluency and Appropriacy

The Chinese experience

I first ran into the distinction between *fluency* and *accuracy* when I was teaching in the People's Republic of China for two years, between 1980 and 1982. There, we discovered a group of people who had been studying English secretly. For although you could study Russian, until 1978 it was dangerous to study English.

The people we were dealing with were top scientists from all over China who had been studying English secretly in groups or alone, sort of by candlelight. The only input they had in terms of language was BEO special English and the BBC. So, they did not really have very much natural input. These were really interesting people. When we first encountered them, we didn't know what to expect so we gave them some tests. They did very well on the grammar section and in reading. The writing scores were close to 0. The listening scores were terrible and their ability to speak was non existing. They knew a lot about the English language, the grammar, but they couldn't read, write, understand or speak it.

This is a situation that we find in lots of places in the world, not just in China. But it was very stark there because China had just opened up and it was such a very closed society before that. What they wanted us to do, was to teach them more grammar. I had a Chinese student tell me: "No, no, no. You, Americans, have it all wrong. What you should do is come into the class. We will stand up. You say 'Sit down', we will sit down. Then you open the book, tell us which page and we will discuss, no, **you** will discuss a paragraph for one hour. It sounded to me a lot like 'explication de texte'".

Teaching ideas

My point of view was a little bit different.

Although it had been in Europe for more than ten years, we had just discovered communicative language teaching in the U.S. We thought it was brand new and wonderfully exciting. We had discovered notional/functional syllabuses as early as 1979 and so we were going to take those to China and we were going to save them with these new language teaching methods.

And we arrived in China and we got off of our white horses and we said: "Here we are". And they said: "No, thank you very much. We've been learning languages for a few thousand years using grammar/translation methods. Please open the book and explain the paragraph. We will be happy that way." So, we had run into a conflict, the conflict between us who were right and righteous and young and bright-eyed and them who were one billion strong. There were a billion of them and there were nine of us. So, we had a problem on our hands.

The first thing we had to do was to figure out what it is that we really wanted them to do. The second thing was to try to convince them to do it our way.

None of this was very easy. We thought about what was happening to us and we realized these were people who did not need any more structural thinking. They knew more about the English language than we do. So, it was not a comfortable situation really and they didn't need any more grammar. They had learned English like we learned Latin and they couldn't do anything with it. How could we change the situation? Since they had the accuracy we wanted to increase their fluency. How could we get them to become more fluent? And so we tried to figure out how the two things were related and how they were different from each other.

Constituents of accuracy and fluency

My guess is that *accuracy* is about phonemes. It's about syntax and it's about lexis or vocabulary. It's about the kinds of things we habitually teach in a grammar/translation or even in an audio/lingual course. It's a very narrow set of linguistic items that the students learn as a useful system, but a set of things that are not in and of themselves enough to create fluency.

The next question of course is: what is *fluency*?

- *Spontaneity* and *ability to actually communicate* and a large range of *syntax*.
- Somehow *idioms* often get left out of the vocabulary. Idioms have another aspect to them that is a little different from the kind of oralized language approach. They are chunks.
- *Rhythm.*
- *Speed and speech delivery*. Fluidity, although speed has something to do with it. Sometimes, native speakers speak more slowly in some situations. Appropriate speed.
- *Stress.*
- *Gestures*. Attitudes compared to speaking French. When speaking English, you have to become colder and less emotional and more puritanical. Ability to adapt.
- *Understanding*. It's a fallacy that fluency is about speaking. I think interactive spontaneity is also related to the unpredictability of language.

The mistakes of native speakers

When I speak English, there are pauses, hesitations, errors. It's a cluster of things. You don't notice them because you concentrate on the message. It's a whole set of strategies that native speakers use and I suspect that one of the main problems that occur for students, in terms of their fluency in English, is that they demand far too much of themselves. With the Chinese students, what I would say is : "Watch how I am delivering the language and what mistakes I am making. Although I am a native speaker, there are pauses, hesitations, backtracking and repetitions." I would actually have to illustrate that to them. "What you, Chinese students, are expecting is to speak English perfectly in complete sentences, with perfect syntax, perfect phonology. But I don't." In a sense, it cripples people. This is the result of teaching them model sentences - which is all right, up to a point.

You have to realize that, in China, they had the syntax. We didn't want their accuracy to go down, but rather, we wanted their focus to shift. They started out with 100% focus on accuracy and we gradually wanted to increase their focus on fluency. How do you get these things to begin to happen when people have been indoctrinated and trained in this way? Little by little, you sneak up on them by making sure that the language they are using is purposeful language, that the messages they are trying to communicate are real.

In his book on applied linguistics, H. Widdowson made a distinction between *genuine* and *authentic*, particularly with reference to people learning ESP. We often use the word "authentic", meaning we are using real language. For example, we may use real engineering language with the students to read an engineering passage and answer multiple-choice questions. Typically, in the U.S., engineering students will solve problems on their examination.

Whatever they do or will have to do with English ultimately - would be the authentic use of the language. We do language training in engineering. In China, we tried to give the students some reason to actually communicate.

As we didn't know much about the sciences at all, we would ask students to explain things to us as a way of creating situations where they had to authentically or at least genuinely use the language for real purposes, to explain to us or to the others in the classroom, whether they were physicists, biologists, chemists and engineers.

Giving presentations

At the upper level, the last project consisted in speaking for ten minutes about their own field of study such as building dams on the Yang Tse river or using acupuncture in surgery, topics that were interesting to them to actually communicate with us.

So, I think that was one of the primary tools we used: forget accuracy, focus on the message and get the message across.

However, speaking in small groups among themselves created the fear of losing face. And so, we had to explain to them what we thought language was and how it worked. We talked to them of how, in group work, you don't learn from the others' errors. You learn from yourself. You learn fluency by getting what you know to actually come out and correcting it.

So, we had to convince them. When they realized that it was necessary for them to make mistakes, then they were finally able to break free. So, errors become a very important thing. Of course if you say that, you absolutely must not stand there and correct their errors. You must tolerate tremendous variations in English but try to understand their message while they get it across.

Teaching register and style

Let me back up and give you another example. I studied French for four years at university in L.A. and then I studied at l'Université d'Aix- Marseille for one year and, during that time, I was basically crippled. The first few months I was just desperate. I knew I could do just about everything if you gave me enough time. The problem was that people wouldn't stand around and wait. I was addicted to nicotine, but I couldn't buy cigarettes. I was an alcoholic, but I was afraid to go into a bar.

Since all of us were going to Aix-en-Provence, a little bit of Marseille dialect might have been useful, slang phrases or at least those phrases that are idiomatic. What's the difference? Slang is passing perhaps and idiomatic is permanent. Give me the idiomatic stuff, don't for goodness' sake tell me to use the "vous" form.

At University, they had told me to use "vous" for it was always safer. But nobody did except the professors, of course. For goodness' sake, tell me what "vachement" means. This obviously has been around for twenty years. What is a "sèche"? I didn't know that word for "cigarette". They didn't teach me, although some of them were French people.

They were trained very narrowly in literature. I would have liked to see a lot more expansion in what they did.

They never taught us about *registers*. And when I was getting into arguments in a bar, I had nothing, no recourse.

The point is, they gave me a very narrow view. They didn't show me much by way of register.

How about sexual, psychological and social roles?

Of course, there are differences between the way men and women speak. In any culture, I should guess, certainly in North American culture, there's been a lot of research done on that. At research meetings among equals, it turns out that women speak less often and less long than men do, regularly. Why is that? They don't consider themselves as important. There's also the issue of size and volume.

We have dialectal differences and I referred to that briefly earlier. It's well worth thinking about dialectal differences between R.P. and the 150 other dialects in England that have more speakers by far and/or North American English. There are basically three dialects in the U.S. and in Canada. How about Australia?

Prise de notes par Anne Péchou

CONTRIBUTIONS DE LAIRDIL

L'authenticité a-t-elle une incidence sur la fluidité ?

La distinction entre *genuine language* et *authentic language* (que H. G. Widdowson développe dans *Teaching Language Communication*, Oxford University Press, l978, p. 80) et à laquelle J. D. Brown fait allusion dans sa conférence est une donnée intéressante lorsqu'on examine la relation entre *fluency* (aisance, fluidité) et *accuracy* (exactitude, correction) dans la production de messages en L2.

Widdowson fait une première distinction entre *usage* et *use* qui est à rapprocher de la distinction entre langue et parole faite par de Saussure ou encore entre compétence et performance que l'on trouve chez Chomsky.

On peut résumer cette première distinction en disant que l'enseignement d'une langue consiste non seulement à développer la capacité de produire des phrases correctes mais aussi la capacité de discerner quelles phrases conviennent dans un contexte donné. Dans le premier cas, les mots et phrases utilisés ne servent qu'à mettre en évidence le système de la langue alors que dans le second on utilise ce système à des fins de communication; la notion de correction serait plus liée à la première de ces aptitudes qu'à la seconde:

> In normal circumstances, linguistic performance involves the simultaneous manifestation of the language system as usage and its realization as use (...). When we are engaged in conversation we do not as a rule take note of such usage phenomena as grammatical irregularities (which may be quite frequent) in the speech of the person we are talking to, unless they force themselves on our attention by impeding communication. Our concern is with use and this concern filters out such irregularities of usage. (Widdowson, *op.* cité, p. 3 et 4).

On pourrait penser que la distinction entre *genuine* et *authentic* s'arrête là: un discours construit conformément au système de la langue serait *genuine* mais pour qu'il puisse être qualifié d'*authentic* il faudrait qu'il ait été en outre construit à des fins communicatives. C'est un peu la distinction que l'on fait quand on oppose documents authentiques et documents "fabriqués" pour la classe, en particulier dans l'enseignement des langues de spécialité.

Mais Widdowson et Brown vont plus loin encore dans cette distinction. Ce que nous appelons document authentique n'est qualifié d'authentique par eux que s'il est utilisé à ses fins premières c'est à dire dans le contexte pour lequel il a été initialement créé.

Un document authentique sorti de son contexte à des fins pédagogiques reste *genuine* mais n'est plus *authentic*.

Widdowson prend comme exemple les extraits de documents authentiques que l'on propose comme support d'exercices de compréhension écrite:

> The extracts are, by definition, *genuine* instances of language use, but if the learner is required to deal with them in a way which does not correspond to his normal

communicative activities, then they cannot be said to be *authentic* instances of use. Genuineness is a characteristic of the passage itself and is an absolute quality. Authenticity is a characteristic of the relationship between the passage and the reader and it has to do with appropriate response. (op. cité, p. 80).

En réponse à une question qui lui a été posée sur le sujet, J. D. Brown prend comme exemple la langue de spécialité:

> My expansion of the distinction is that authentic language use is language used as it would really be used in the real world. Genuine language use, on the other hand, is also real language, but it is used for classroom teaching purposes. For instance, if we wanted to use a real engineering lecture for teaching listening comprehension and we had the students listen to the videotape and answer multiple-choice questions about it, that would be genuine because it was real language, but we used it for classroom teaching purposes (engineers would never answer multiple choice questions immediately after listening to a lecture; indeed, they usually do problem-solving questions rather than multiple choice even when they do take a test later on a collection of lectures). To make the engineering lecture authentic, we would have to do the same things with it that the engineers actually do. This is usually impossible due to time and pedagogical constraints. So authentic use of language becomes a goal, but in most cases genuine (classroom) use is all we can achieve. It is nevertheless useful to attempt to move as close to authentic language use as possible so that the ESP experience of students will be as close as possible to their very real needs in the future.

Bien qu'il ait mentionné cette distinction entre langue "vraie" et langue "authentique" au cours de sa conférence, J. D. Brown n'a pas clairement précisé quelle pouvait en être l'incidence sur la correction et la fluidité. La correction étant, comme on l'a dit plus haut, liée à la production de langue "réelle" (genuine), l'aisance et la fluidité sont-elles plus particulièrement associées à l'authenticité ?

C'est en tout cas une hypothèse que paraît confirmer l'expérience faite avec des étudiants de deuxième année dans un département de Génie Mécanique d'IUT et renouvelée chaque année avec les mêmes résultats.

Il s'agit en fait de comparer deux activités très semblables mais dont l'une est une pure activité de classe alors que l'autre se rapproche beaucoup plus d'une activité authentique, à savoir la soutenance du stage industriel faite en anglais par les étudiants qui ont effectué ce stage dans un pays anglophone.

L'exercice de classe consiste pour chaque étudiant à présenter sous forme d'exposé et de schéma qu'il commente au tableau, un procédé de fabrication développé dans un document technique qui lui a été remis. Ce genre d'exercice ressemble beaucoup à la partie technique de la soutenance qui consiste à expliquer, souvent à l'aide de schémas ou de transparents, un problème technique que l'étudiant à eu à résoudre au cours du stage, le cheminement suivi, les résultats. Il fait appel au même vocabulaire, aux mêmes structures grammaticales et les deux requièrent une préparation.

Mais les prestations sont très différentes. Tout d'abord si l'exercice de classe permet de porter une appréciation sur la correction des étudiants, il ne donne que peu d'indications sur leur aisance. Sur ce point, en effet, on observe peu de différences entre eux. Dans tous les cas, le caractère artificiel de l'exercice transparaît dans le débit monotone, la courbe mélodique assez plate, la difficulté à synchroniser commentaire et dessin, la quasi impossibilité de reformuler une explication "apprise" ou à saisir une question de l'auditoire et à y répondre spontanément et cela indépendamment du niveau de langue des étudiants.

On peut vraisemblablement expliquer cela, d'une part par le fait que les étudiants sont extérieurs au sujet traité, d'autre part parce qu'ils s'attachent à la formulation correcte qu'ils ont bien préparée et font plus appel à leur mémoire qu'à leurs autres compétences. La précision du vocabulaire et la correction grammaticale sont d'ailleurs en général très satisfaisantes pour l'ensemble des étudiants.

En revanche, la soutenance s'avère beaucoup plus révélatrice en ce qui concerne la fluidité et fait apparaître de grandes disparités entre des étudiants dont les prestations étaient très proches dans l'exercice précédent parce que nivelées, on l'a vu, par son caractère artificiel. L'un sera très embarrassé dans sa production orale, hésitant, ânonnant, difficile à suivre, recourant sans cesse au support écrit; un autre au contraire surprendra par son aisance, tant par le débit, les intonations, que par la capacité à trouver un synonyme pour se faire comprendre d'un jury qui n'est pas forcément angliciste, ou encore à improviser une explication en réponse à une question posée à brûle pourpoint.

On peut donc dire que le caractère authentique de cette activité favorise l'aisance ou plus exactement la manifestation de cette aisance. Elle ne rend certes pas miraculeusement "fluent" l'étudiant qui ne l'est pas. On vient de voir au contraire qu'elle met en évidence les carences. En revanche elle révèle cette aisance chez ceux qui la possèdent à des degrés divers. Le fait d'avoir bénéficié d'un bain linguistique de plusieurs semaines n'est certainement pas étranger à cet épanouissement. Toutefois il semble bien que la forte motivation créée par le caractère authentique de la situation (intérêt porté au sujet, nécessité de se faire comprendre, envie aussi de faire partager une expérience sans doute riche, tant sur le plan personnel que professionnel) soit un facteur important de déblocage. On est d'ailleurs surpris parfois par l'aisance dont font preuve certains étudiants jusque-là considérés comme faibles. Bien sûr, la correction n'est pas toujours au rendez-vous (avec des fautes telles que la confusion entre participe présent et passé, des prétérits irréguliers en *-ed*, l'emploi du futur dans les subordonnées de temps, etc.). Elle est même souvent inversement proportionnelle: plus l'étudiant est à l'aise dans le ton, le débit et le vocabulaire, plus il laisse passer de fautes même si, dans certains cas, au demeurant très rares, l'étudiant corrige spontanément certaines de ses fautes sans interrompre son discours, comme le ferait un "native speaker".

Reste à savoir si l'on peut toujours dire d'un étudiant qu'il est "fluent" quand trop de fautes émaillent sa production orale. C'est une autre question : celle de la place qu'il faut accorder à la correction dans la définition et l'évaluation de la fluidité, question qui constituerait à elle seule un vaste sujet de recherche.

Aimée Blois

La parole sans douleur

Becoming fluent

When we are new,
the world comes to us
in syllables (...)

Lillien Waller
C. W. Sherman, ed. ***Sisterfire***
London: The Women's Press, 1994, p. 4

Question de définition: réactions à la conférence de J.D. Brown

Comment définir l'***aisance dans le maniement d'une langue***[1]? Beaucoup s'y sont essayé (Jack Richards, *The English Teaching Matrix*, C.U.P., p. 75) mais le résultat reste insatisfaisant, sans doute parce qu'il n'y a pas un modèle unique d'AML, ni un seuil identifiable à tout coup. Il est par contre plus facile d'isoler les facteurs qui composent cette AML et J. D. Brown (pp. 9-33 dans cet ouvrage) a le mérite d'en faire un catalogue précis et exhaustif. Aucun de ces critères, à lui seul, n'est suffisant. On peut rencontrer des personnes qui s'expriment couramment dans une langue sans pour autant répondre à tous ces critères. C'est le cas, par exemple, de tous les étrangers qui n'arrivent pas "à perdre leur accent" même après vingt ans dans un pays ou celui de beaucoup de personnes qui "se débrouillent bien" avec une grammaire approximative (et un accent très typé; en général les deux vont ensemble).

Lorsque nous parlons d'AML dans une interaction orale (le problème de la lecture se pose de façon différente), l'un des facteurs à prendre en considération, en plus du/de la locuteur/trice, est le/la récepteur/trice et nous pourrions proposer la définition suivante, qui n'a rien de "scientifique" mais qui

[1] Il est difficile de trouver un équivalent français satisfaisant au mot *fluency*, le terme *fluidité* étant par essence trop fluide, donc trop vague. Nous l'appellerons ici AML (aisance dans le maniement de la langue). De même, la notion d'*accuracy* n'est pas vraiment traduite par *précision* et le mot *correction* est trop vague, lui aussi. Nous l'appellerons ici CGLP (correction grammaticale, lexicale et phonologique).
Ces deux notions de *fluency* et *d'accuracy* seraient-elles étrangères au français? Je ne le crois pas. Nous possédons suffisamment de bavards et d'académiciens.

prend en compte une dimension subjective que l'on pourrait appeler le confort d'écoute:

Une personne parle couramment lorsqu'une une autre peut l'écouter sans effort (et sans souffrance), sans s'impatienter, sans que l'intérêt qu'elle manifestait au départ ne diminue à cause du manque d'AML.

De même qu'on entend souvent dire "Je ne connais rien en art mais je sais ce que j'aime", on pourrait dire "Je ne sais pas ce que c'est que parler couramment mais je sais reconnaître une personne qui parle couramment." C'est d'ailleurs le critère que bon nombre d'entre nous, pédagogues, appliquons lorsque nous avons à évaluer une performance orale rapidement et ne voulons ni ne pouvons appliquer des tests de type Cambridge ou de ceux d'entreprises telles qu'IBM ou la Chambre de Commerce.

On ne peut néanmoins se contenter d'une notion aussi floue et subjective.

L'aisance à manipuler une langue dans tous ses aspects (syntaxique, lexical, phonologique), dans tous les contextes et les registres, implique une certaine vitesse. Mais il faut se demander si la vitesse n'est pas essentiellement une caractéristique individuelle: certaines personnes parlent vite et d'autres parlent lentement. Antoine de Caunes dans son émission de télévision sur le rock, "Rapido", dans laquelle, comme son titre l'indique, il s'évertuait à parler le plus rapidement possible et François Mitterrand qui peut arriver jusqu'à 50% de silences (ce qui est un pourcentage standard selon Brown) parlent tous deux couramment mais le premier trois ou quatre fois plus vite que le second.

Question de recherche

Au cours de la discussion qui a suivi la conférence de J. D. Brown, nous nous sommes demandé s'il existait une constante dans la vitesse entre L1 et L2 et si, pour définir la fluidité, il ne valait pas mieux comparer ce qui est comparable (deux langues chez un même individu) plutôt que la performance de l'individu par rapport à un supposé idéal.

Nous avons donc décidé de mesurer les caractéristiques de production de langage en L1 et en L2 pour voir si elles sont identiques, et notamment s'il y a un rapport constant dans les deux vitesses (on pourrait supposer par exemple que la vitesse est de 20% inférieure en L2).

Conduite de l'expérience

- ***Phase 1***

Sujets

6 étudiant(e)s de 2ème cycle de sciences de niveau "avancé" en anglais.
1 Anglaise enseignante d'anglais
1 Française ayant vécu trente ans en Angleterre

Enregistrements

Il a été demandé aux volontaires de choisir librement un sujet puis de parler pendant une minute, d'abord en L1 puis en L2 (le sujet pouvait être différent dans les deux langues). Les enregistrements ont été effectués dans une cabine de laboratoire de langues.

Analyse

Les enregistrements ont été transcrits, les mots comptés (y compris les répétitions). Il est vite apparu que l'on pouvait (et devait) analyser d'autres critères que la vitesse et nous avons surligné de couleurs différentes les incorrections (syntaxiques et lexicales), les transferts de L1 à L2, les hésitations, les répétitions, les autocorrections, les pauses parlées (*mm*, *er*). Sans aller jusqu'à compter tous ces éléments, cela donne une sorte de "carte d'identité" ou de "carte de géographie" individuelle lisible d'un coup d'œil.

- ***Phase 2***

Lors d'un séminaire international d'enseignant(e)s d'anglais ou nombre de participant(e)s étaient plurilingues (une langue maternelle, une ou deux langues secondes - langue de l'école et langue du travail - et au moins une langue étrangère) il est apparu que l'étude des relations entre L2 et L3 pourrait s'avérer féconde. Une dizaine d'enregistrements a été effectuée: 3 en L1 et L2 qui se sont donc ajoutés à ceux de la première phase et 7 en L2 et L3. Il n'a été possible d'en faire qu'un en L1, L2 et L3 par impossibilité d'analyser l'arabe ou le croate. Les conditions matérielles ont été quelque peu différentes: un magnétophone et un micro, pas de limite de temps et une intervention ponctuelle quelquefois pour "relancer" le monologue. Après la transcription, la moyenne de mots-minute a été calculée.

Premiers résultats

Nom	Nationalité	Vitesse L1 (mots-minute	Vitesse L2 (mots-minute)	Vitesse L3 (mots-minute)	%: L1/L2 et L2/L3	Différence de vitesse	Nb d'hésitations L1/mn	Nb d'hésitations L2/mn	Nb de répétitions L1/mn	Nb de répétitions L2/mn	Nb d'ereurs L2/mn	Nb d'erreurs L2/mn	Nb d'auto-corrections L1/mn	Nb d'auto-corrections L2/mn	Anglicismes
Groupe L1/L2															
Alain	français	172	88		51.16	84	0	2	0	0	2	7	0	0	
Bruce	français	151	137		90.72	14	11	4	10	0	1	8	0	0	
Bruno	français	118	121		102.54	-3	2	4	1	7	3	11	0	0	
Elisabeth	française	177	144		81.35	33	0	2	0	0	1	9	0	1	
Françoise	française	118	160		135.59	-42	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	1	
Gwili	américaine	159	75		47.16	84	4	3	6	4	0	9	1	3	
Jean-Yves	français	199	153		76.88	46	1	5	2	5	4	3	1	2	
Nadine	française	174	89		51.12	85	3	0	4	10	0	3	0	0	
Sarah	française	146	99		66.36	47	4	4	8	5	5	1	0	1	
Susan	anglaise	175	157		89.71	18	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	
Trent	américain	150	111		74.01	39	2	7	2	5	0	7	0	1	
Groupe L2/L3															
Mu'in	saoudien		87	54	62.06	33	1.14	2	0.28	0.25	0.8	7.25	0	0	3
Abdallah	marocain		143	133	93	10	3	1.7	3	2	0	0	0	0	0
Amal	égyptienne		155	161	103.87	-6	7.3	8.5	3	0.57	3.86	1.14	0.42	0.57	2.57
Hamid	marocain		117	131	111.96	-14	0.8	4.8	4	4.8	1.33	1.2	0	1.44	0
Jasenka	croate		154	82	53.24	72	3	6	0.5	3	1.5	4	1.5	1	2

Vitesse d'élocution

- L1-L2

La vitesse est variable selon les individus et les circonstances aussi bien en L1 qu'en L2. La vitesse "normale" en L1 (tout au moins la vitesse moyenne dans le cadre de cette expérience) semble se situer aux alentours de 150-175 mots-minute (il faudrait sans doute compter les syllabes). Le plus grand écart entre L1 et L2, comme on pouvait s'y attendre, se trouve chez ceux/celles qui maîtrisent le moins bien la langue. Aux alentours de 80 mots de différence, on peut dire que la fluidité laisse à désirer. Au-dessous de 45 les sujets ont une bonne fluidité. Il y a bien sûr des exceptions (*Annexe 1: Etude de cas*).

On peut donc avancer que lorsque l'on veut évaluer la fluidité d'un sujet, on devrait effectuer ce calcul de la différence entre L1 et L2, pour faire la part de ce qui est difficulté personnelle et carence dans la compétence en L2.

- L2-L3

Les bons locuteurs se situent entre -14 et + 40 mots de différence, les autres étant quasiment balbutiants. Dans les deux cas où le chiffre est négatif, c'est-à-dire où la vitesse est supérieure en L3, il s'agit d'individus qui parlent leur langue seconde moins fréquemment que leur L3 à l'heure actuelle, qui sont en quelque sorte “ rouillés ”, phénomène bien connu de quiconque séjourne longtemps loin de sa terre natale, sans contact avec sa langue maternelle. On peut donc dire que la moyenne est comparable à celle du groupe précédent.

Discussion des critères analysés (surlignés lors de la transcription)

Hésitations et répétitions

Les *hésitations* sont autant des marques de mauvaise maîtrise de la langue, que des façons de chercher sa pensée, de réfléchir à ce qu'on va dire et même souvent des tics à la mode, surtout en anglais, sans parler des "bon", "j'veux dire" (= "I mean") et autres formes de remplissage qui peuvent varier selon les modes et les individus.

Les *répétitions* sont aussi des marques d'hésitation. Leur fréquence est très élevée chez certains sujets, absente chez d'autres (*Annexe 2: Etude de cas*).

Incorrections, transferts et autocorrection

Les *erreurs syntaxiques et lexicales* se produisent normalement en L2 avec une plus grande fréquence. Chez certain(e)s cependant elles sont aussi fréquentes en L1 (*Jean-Yves*, *Sarah*). Peut-on trouver des cas où L2 est plus correct que L1? Sans doute, mais il s'agit de corrections différentes. L'incorrection en L1 vient de certaines formes grammaticales couramment bafouées ou de formules argotiques. Lorsque l'on dit des personnes qui maîtrisent bien une L2 qu'elles parlent mieux que les "natifs" ou encore qu'elles parlent comme des livres, c'est justement parce que, souvent, leur correction est acquise dans les livres, à l'école et qu'elles n'ont pas l'aisance, l'assurance nécessaire dans l'incorrection.

Dans le groupe L1/L2, on ne relève pas de *transferts* (gallicismes ou anglicismes) mais ils sont assez nombreux dans le groupe L2/L3. Leur présence recouvre deux phénomènes: on ne maîtrise pas bien la L3 et donc on se sert de mots de la L2 quand on sait que l'interlocuteur/trice la comprend; on maîtrise bien les deux langues et on se sert, soit du mot le plus adéquat pour exprimer sa pensée, soit du mot-outil dont on se sert habituellement dans un contexte de travail (vocabulaire spécialisé).

Quel type de faute est acceptable dans la conversation courante? En français oral, la négation simple ne peut pas être comptée comme une faute. Les fautes de temps, l'emploi du présent pour le passé, sont des fautes graves sur le plan académique mais elles n'entravent pas forcément l'élocution ni la compréhension, elles sont simplement moins confortables pour la personne qui écoute. Certaines fautes ne sont commises que par les étrangers: par exemple, un anglophone ne dirait pas "do mistakes" alors que c'est une erreur courante en L2.

Il y a très peu de corrections spontanées en L2 et L3.

Y a-t-il une relation entre vitesse et nombre de fautes? Peut-être. Ce serait un sujet d'étude intéressant.

La CGLP semble être une composante importante de l'AML, ce qui est normal dans la mesure où cela fait gagner du temps. N.G. Fulcher (Surrey, Grande-Bretagne) envoie ce commentaire sur Internet à une question posée sur la relation entre *accuracy* et *fluency*:

> It seems, from available evidence to date, that the "fluency/accuracy" division is a convenient pedagogic fiction, which allows us to structure language classes along a continuum of the more traditional "presentation-practice" type. The terminology therefore serves a function, but we should not be tricked into thinking that this represents "reality" just because the constructs have labels. (13 avril 1995).

Prononciation

Elle ne me semble pas un critère pertinent chez les gens avancés. Chacun(e) aime entendre certains accents étrangers. La fluidité de Jane Birkin n'est pas à mettre en doute et elle se fait très bien comprendre. Les anglophones disent aimer l'accent français. De tous les sujets étudiés, *Susan* a sans doute le pire accent et la meilleure correction mais cet accent n'entraîne pas d'incompréhension, donc il est acceptable.

Conclusion

A ce stade de l'étude, qui n'en est qu'à ses balbutiements, rappelons-le, on peut conclure que le meilleur critère pour apprécier l'AML est celui de confort d'écoute.

Cependant, il faut nécessairement une certaine vitesse (au-dessous de 100 mots-minute il devient difficile de parler d'AML sauf dans des cas extrêmes).

Il faut également que le nombre d'hésitations/répétitions autres que des particularismes idiosyncratiques (et que l'on retrouve en L1) n'excède pas une ou deux par minute.

Il en va de même pour la correction syntaxique et lexicale. Le seuil ici doit même être plus bas.

Pour la prononciation par contre, un "accent" étranger, s'il est uniforme, ne heurte pas (il peut même être agréable), surtout si, par ailleurs, l'AML et la CGL sont satisfaisantes. Beaucoup plus gênantes sont les erreurs de prononciation ou d'intonation épisodiques.

Enfin, d'après les enregistrements faits, on peut dire que les relations entre L2 (quand L2 est langue seconde) et L3 et entre L1 et L2 sont semblables (*Annexe 3 : Etude de cas)*.

Il faudrait cependant pouvoir s'appuyer sur un plus grand nombre de données et élargir cette étude car au cours de ce premier travail, un certain nombre de questions se sont posées:

- A partir de quel moment peut-on dire de quelqu'un qu'il/elle parle couramment une langue? A quel stade de l'interlangue? (Brown dit: à tous les stades).
- Quels facteurs individuels/conjoncturels doivent être pris en compte, notamment dans un contexte académique lors d'une évaluation?

  En un mot, comment définir le seuil d'accession au nirvâna de l'AML?

Comme toutes les questions simples, celle de la définition de l'AML s'est révélée complexe et a soulevé plus de problèmes qu'elle n'en a résolu. C'est là, sans doute, l'essence de la recherche.

Annexe 1

Etude de cas: Sujets "hors normes"

- •**Jean-Yves** (199 mots-minute en L1, 153 en L2) a une élocution très rapide, en tous temps; c'est un extraverti. Cette vitesse se reflète en L2, élevée pour quelqu'un qui n'a passé dans un pays de langue anglaise que quatre fois deux mois, entre la sixième et la troisième.

- **Bruno** (118-121) était très tendu lors de l'enregistrement. Il s'y est repris à plusieurs fois en français (L1) et a failli abandonner car il ne "trouvait pas ses mots". Du coup, en anglais, sa vitesse était supérieure alors que cet étudiant de niveau très moyen est capable de s’exprimer lorsqu’il est très motivé. Quasiment muet tout au long de l'année, un matin de printemps il monopolise la parole. Interrogé sur ce soudain changement, il affirme n'avoir rien eu d'intéressant à dire jusque-là.
- **Françoise** (118-160) a été enregistrée en L2 sous le coup de la colère, d'où une rapidité assez grande pour quelqu'un qui, d'habitude, parle très lentement. Quand elle s'est exprimée ensuite en français, pour répéter ce qu'elle venait de dire en anglais, la colère était un peu retombée. De plus, cette colère était née dans un contexte de langue anglaise donc elle était peut-être momentanément plus à l'aise en L2, à cause du sujet discuté en L2. En L1, il a fallu "traduire" sa pensée d'une certaine manière.

Annexe 2

Etude de cas: Hésitations

- • **Nadine et Sarah (146-99)** bégaient quasiment, aussi bien en L1 qu'en L2. Ces deux sujets sont des étudiantes assez peu sûres d'elles, toujours tendues et qui traitaient des sujets très personnels.
- Chez **Bruce (151-137)**, les hésitations, très nombreuses en L1, tiennent sans doute au fait qu'il ne maîtrisait pas vraiment le sujet qu'il avait choisi (les extraterrestres) qui l'a très vite dépassé. Pour la description des ET notamment il a eu de la peine à trouver des mots. Il n'y a aucune répétition en L2.
- **Bruno (118-121)** utilise beaucoup la répétition en L2 (pas en L1), par carences.
- Chez **Trent (150-111)**, les hésitations en L1 sont clairement des tics (il a une élocution quasi-parfaite en L1) alors que son français (L2) est plus hésitant.

Annexe 3

Etude de cas: Rapports entre langue seconde et langue étrangère

On retrouve la même différence, atténuée puisque les sujets sont quasiment bilingues, voire trilingues. Il est intéressant de considérer chaque cas individuellement car l'échantillon est trop petit, et sans doute trop particulier (enseignant-e-s de langues) pour tirer des conclusions générales. Il faut continuer l'étude.

	L1	**L2**	**L3**
Amal	arabe	français	anglais
Mariano	espagnol	français	anglais
Mona	arabe	anglais	français
Hamid	berbère et arabe	français	anglais
Abdallah	arabe	français	anglais

- **Amal**

Le français est sa langue seconde (appris dans une école française dès l'âge de quatre ans), mais à partir de douze ans elle a effectué sa scolarité en anglais. Elle a fait des études supérieures en anglais et séjourné six ans en Grande-Bretagne. Elle enseigne l'anglais à l'université. Ses fils sont dans une école française. Elle exprime un attachement sentimental au français qu'elle parle volontiers et avec plaisir. Mais sa maîtrise de l'anglais est meilleure: école anglaise à un moment de sa vie où la réflexion est plus élaborée, études en anglais, très long séjour en Grande-Bretagne.

Sa vitesse est à peine plus rapide en anglais mais la différence se fait au niveau de la correction. Le débit en français s'accélère et la correction augmente quand elle parle de sa vie personnelle plutôt que de questions professionnelles (on passe de 137 à 175 mots-minute). Les sujets personnels, ceux de la vie courante, sont plus faciles à manier que les sujets abstraits qui demandent plus de réflexion et ralentissent le débit. Manifestement aussi, il y a eu également "échauffement" en français au cours de l'enregistrement puisque l'ambiance générale était en anglais.

Bien que le français soit L2 pour elle, elle commet beaucoup d'erreurs de syntaxe (structures copiées sur les structures anglaises) et certains mots lui viennent en anglais plutôt qu'en français. Ces transferts sont dus au fait qu'elle parle beaucoup plus anglais que français maintenant et qu'elle a l'habitude d'aborder certains sujets dans cette langue. Au niveau phonologique persiste un accent arabe ([r] roulé) dans les deux langues. Sinon, la prononciation, l'intonation sont bonnes.

- **Mariano**

C'est un Espagnol parfaitement bilingue espagnol-français, ayant effectué toute sa scolarité au Luxembourg, en France, en Belgique et au lycée français de Madrid. Il enseigne la philologie anglaise à l'université de Madrid. Il a toujours parlé espagnol à la maison.

Son français est très correct, très idiomatique, sans origine espagnole décelable. Il a une très bonne maîtrise des contractions. Ses hésitations, nombreuses, sont dues au fait que c'est un bavard impénitent, capable de parler pendant des heures sur n'importe quel sujet et qui fait du remplissage. Il passe alternativement d'un débit très rapide à une autre beaucoup plus lent, plus articulé, et ceci dans les trois langues. C'est donc une idiosyncrasie plutôt qu'une expression de difficulté momentanée.

Curieusement, c'est en espagnol que son débit est le plus lent mais cela peut s'expliquer peut-être par le fait que depuis plusieurs jours il n'avait parlé qu'anglais ou français.

En anglais son débit est un tout petit peu plus lent qu'en français (mais toujours supérieur à l'espagnol).

Il n'y a pas d'incorrections, dans aucune des trois langues mais beaucoup plus d'hésitations, de répétitions en anglais et en français. L'abondance d'hésitations (*mm, er*) en anglais est sans doute plus le fait d'un tic de langage très anglais, à la mode, surtout avec son accent très QE.

- •**Mona**

Egyptienne, elle a été éduquée de cinq à seize ans dans une école de soeurs irlandaises puis a fait des études d'anglais et a séjourné cinq ans en Grande-Bretagne. Elle parle arabe à la maison. Avant d'apprendre le français à l'école (de douze à quinze ans) elle l'a appris dans sa famille, en écoutant ses soeurs qui allaient dans une école française. D’après elle, elle comprend tout, alors qu'elle est consciente que son expression laisse à désirer. Le français est une langue qu'elle aime parler, elle le considère comme sa langue "personnelle".

Son anglais est quasi-parfait. Son débit en français est plus lent, elle commet plus d'erreurs (à tous niveaux), elle hésite, elle cherche ses mots mais c'est par manque de pratique. On sent qu'elle a appris le français oralement d'abord, par sa maîtrise des contractions, sa facilité à décrire des scènes de la vie courante. Elle a atteint un degré de *fluency* qui manque juste d'un peu d'*accuracy*.

- •**Abdallah**

Marocain, sa langue maternelle est l'arabe. De cinq ans jusqu'au bac il a suivi un enseignement tout en français. Il a étudié l'anglais à partir de la 4ème, a fait des études d'anglais et passé sept ans au Canada, aux Etats-Unis et en Angleterre. Maintenant il parle anglais au travail, français assez peu (sauf avec sa femme, professeur de français, avec ses amis; sa fille est dans une école de langue française).

On peut remarquer chez lui le même phénomène que chez Mariano: un débit très rapide en français, très contracté par moments, très articulé à d'autres.

Son français est parfait, notamment sa maîtrise des formes contractées. Il ne commet pas d'erreurs de temps, ni d'erreur de genre. Son anglais est également parfait. ses hésitations, répétitions dans les deux langues sont plus le fait d'une précipitation ou d'un tic. La vitesse est légèrement supérieure en français et reste constante. En anglais, elle augmente au bout d'un moment (échauffement nécessaire?)

- • **Hamid**

Marocain, sa langue maternelle est le berbère, sa langue seconde l'arabe (à partir de six ans à l'école), sa langue troisième le français (à partir de huit ans). Il commence l'anglais à seize ans, fait des études d'anglais, est enseignant d'anglais. Il n'a fait qu'un seul séjour de 21 jours en Grande-Bretagne.

Il parle très bien anglais, notamment au niveau phonologique, malgré son début tardif et pratiquement aucun séjour dans un pays de langue anglaise. Il l'explique par le fait que les Marocains sont doués pour les langues. Pour lui, c'est sa quatrième langue.

Son débit est plus rapide en anglais qu'en français. Il parle plus souvent anglais que français maintenant, dit-il. Mais, alors qu'il marque peu d'hésitations en français, elle sont nombreuses en anglais et il a tendance a remplir son discours d'expressions toutes faites qui ne veulent pas dire grand chose dans le contexte (*at that time, at the time*, expression qu'Abdallah emploie beaucoup aussi, *I mean*, ou encore *disons*, en français).

Nicole Décuré

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Réponse à J. D. Brown

La communication de J. D. Brown, "Fluency and Appropriacy", appelle deux remarques que l'on peut regrouper autour des termes de l'énoncé :

1. **Enseigner la loquacité** (*fluency*)

Parlant de son expérience d'enseignement de l'anglais en Chine au début des années 80, il présente le choix d'enseigner par la méthode communicative à la fois comme une importante découverte et comme la panacée.

Or, qui était le public concerné?

Des scientifiques de premier ordre qui avaient, des années durant, appris l'anglais sous le couvert, uniquement avec des livres. Bien qu'ils n'aient eu aucune possibilité de pratiquer la conversation, ces apprenants avaient des bases grammaticales, lexicales et syntaxiques solides. Aussi, mettre en œuvre la méthode communicative pour développer leur compétence orale et *a fortiori* les faire parler de ce qu'ils connaissaient bien, c'est-à-dire de leur travail et de leur recherche coulait de source dans ces circonstances.
C'était également sans risques.

La seule contre-indication aurait été le manque de bases. Sur ce point, se référer à l'ouvrage d'Hammerly (1991) discuté dans ce numéro. Il insiste longuement sur les risques de voir se développer un *pidgin* scolaire qui serait impossible à corriger une fois prises les mauvaises habitudes - si on laisse parler les apprenants trop tôt, ce qui n'était absolument pas le cas ici.

2. **Enseigner les registres** (*appropriacy*)

J. D. Brown cite son cas personnel quand il apprenait le français et déplore que ses maîtres ne lui aient enseigné que le registre formel du "vous" et pas d'argot avant son départ pour Marseille, alors qu'un peu de dialecte marseillais lui aurait été d'un grand secours, dit-il.

C'est oublier qu'il y a autant de variétés de français que de régions et autant de codes spécifiques que de groupes sociaux. Chaque groupe social a son propre registre sociolinguistique, un code connu du groupe seul, constitué de mots nouveaux, mots détournés de leur sens, non-dits, allusions à des événements de clan et que les expressions changent et se démodent à une grande vitesse, selon des modes qui rendent caduc ce qui était la norme quelques mois plus tôt. C'est ce qui rend le code d'un groupe donné si difficile à comprendre pour quelqu'un d'extérieur au groupe, même s'il connaît bien la "langue usuelle". Ces variations du code principal ne peuvent s'acquérir qu'au contact d'un groupe donné.

On voit mal comment un enseignant pourrait connaître et enseigner ces codes spécifiques- à plus forte raison s'il réside aux U.S.A. depuis plusieurs années.

N'en déplaise à M. Brown, il faut donner, surtout aux débutants, les formes standard les plus usuelles et les formes de politesse les plus courantes, y compris le "vous".

La langue devient idiomatique en l'employant *sur le tas*.

Anne Péchou

Compte rendu de lecture

Hector Hammerly (1991). *Fluency and Accuracy.*
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Le livre d'Hector Hammerly est un ouvrage polémique, plaidoyer à la fois contre les méthodes communicatives et contre l'apprentissage précoce d'une langue seconde.

Pour illustrer son propos, il prend le cas des programmes d'immersion au Canada. Bien que, pour des raisons politiques, le mythe de l'éducation bilingue soit entretenu, les résultats sont déplorables. Après 7000 heures en immersion les élèves font de graves erreurs lexicales, syntaxiques et culturelles. Ils parlent une sorte de pidgin, ou de sabir compris seulement de leurs camarades de classe. Par ailleurs, des études ont montré qu'il n'y avait pas de progression grammaticale entre la première et la sixième année d'immersion.

Hammerly s'attaque aux tenants du CAN (Communicative Acquisition Naturalistic megatheory), à Krashen et à Savignon, c'est-à-dire à tous ceux qui soutiennent que l'apprentissage en classe suit un déroulement similaire à celui de la L1. A cela il oppose deux objections:

1. *L'apprentissage de la L1 et de la L2 sont de nature différente.*

Quand il apprend sa langue maternelle, le jeune enfant n'a pas d'autre langue à sa disposition. Pour apprendre une seconde langue, la première langue peut être utilisée pour fournir des explications, faire de l'analyse contrastive et pour prendre conscience des processus mentaux.

Comme les structures mentales de l'enfant sont moins développées que celles de l'adulte, il n'y a pas d'intérêt à enseigner trop tôt. Les adultes apprennent mieux et plus vite que les enfants, y compris pour l'imitation des sons, s'ils sont corrigés correctement.

2. *La classe est différente du milieu naturel.*

L'auteur déplore la tendance à vouloir faire "comme si" la classe équivalait au monde extérieur, alors que c'est un milieu artificiel et pauvre. Les tenants de CAN pensent qu'il faut limiter les corrections et que les erreurs s'éliminent seules. C'est vrai pour la langue maternelle, car l'enfant évolue dans un environnement riche où ce qu'il entend lui permet de corriger ses erreurs.

En milieu scolaire, le manque de corrections favorise l'avènement d'une interlangue impossible à corriger une fois que les habitudes défectueuses sont prises. L'interaction avec les pairs ne permet pas de se corriger et développe un pidgin de classe.

L'approche communicative s'appuie sur une définition de la compétence qui prend en compte la rapidité du débit, voire l'intelligibilité, mais pas la précision. Le bilinguisme fonctionnel qui résulte de l'immersion est en fait du "Franglish", "Spanglish", "Germglish" (comprendre "franglais", etc.). Les étudiants sont linguistiquement incompétents.

L'auteur utilise des termes forts pour stigmatiser les erreurs d'étudiants qui n'ont pas été corrigées systématiquement. Il parle de "butchering the language", de "sloppiness" et de manque de respect envers ses locuteurs.

L'objectif devrait être plus ambitieux, viser un bilinguisme transitionnel. Il faut promouvoir l'idée d'excellence - au moins pour les élèves motivés.

A la place de l'immersion, Hammerly propose un modèle en forme de deux cônes imbriqués l'un dans l'autre stipulant d'enseigner, dans cet ordre :

* la prononciation,
* la grammaire et les structures,
* le vocabulaire.

Selon l'auteur, ce modèle débouche sur l'acquisition de la compétence linguistique, communicative et culturelle.

L'apprentissage scolaire doit se faire *pas à pas*, en procédant de tâches simples à des tâches complexes. Il recommande de ne permettre à l'étudiant d'utiliser que les structures et le vocabulaire déjà vus. Il faut absolument décourager "l'aventurisme linguistique".

Comme la centration sur la *fluidité* ne conduit pas à la précision, il prône un changement de priorités: il faut d'abord travailler la précision, puis changer progressivement d'objectif pour la 'fluidité', une fois que les bases sont en place. Encourager les étudiants à s'exprimer en utilisant une langue d'un degré de difficulté supérieur à leur compétence conduit à des erreurs impossibles à corriger. Il soutient que mettre trop tôt l'accent sur la *fluidité* bloque toute progression future - et qu'au contraire, si on insiste sur la précision dès le départ, on peut espérer obtenir ensuite à la fois la correction et un débit acceptable. Il encourage à parler lentement et correctement, plutôt que vite et en assassinant la langue dans une optique de "gratification retardée".

Les retours doivent venir du professeur, et non des autres étudiants qui font les mêmes erreurs. Pour cette raison, le travail en petits groupes est vivement déconseillé. C'est une hérésie de croire qu'une langue peut s'apprendre en classe par acquisition naturelle comme un sous-produit naturel d'autres activités langagières.

Hammerly recommande de rechercher la cause des erreurs au lieu d'imposer une répétition mécanique - et inefficace - de la forme correcte. Par ailleurs il déplore l'abandon des "*drills*". La recherche sur la correction des erreurs qui est délaissée devrait être poursuivie. Enfin, nous manquons de grammaires décrivant les structures profondes. Celles qui existent sont trop techniques et abstraites pour être utiles.

Le type de test administré détermine ce que l'étudiant apprend. Aussi il importe de distinguer, dans l'évaluation, entre tests de compétence et tests de progression. Les premiers permettent d'évaluer ce qui a été enseigné et non une compétence globale qui produit de la *fluidité* à tout prix. Il recommande de tester chaque étudiant cinq minutes à plusieurs reprises pour vérifier sa compétence et de faire aussi un test de progression. Il est conseillé de tester également la compétence culturelle.

A ce raisonnement bien construit, même s'il est fondé sur l'expérience, on peut opposer plusieurs objections.

Le principe de guider *pas à pas* l'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère est inattaquable, en théorie tout au moins. Mais alors pourquoi tant d'échecs à communiquer effectivement parmi des étudiants qui n'ont pas été exposés aux méthodes communicatives, comme ceux que nous rencontrons à l'université? (Péchou 1994).

La pratique de tout corriger va à l'encontre de la réalité psychologique des étudiants que découragent des interventions incessantes sur la forme les menant à croire que le message est sans intérêt. Par ailleurs et même si l'enseignant fait preuve de diplomatie, les corrections "à chaud" signifient que l'on perd la face, ce qui est difficilement supportable par de jeunes adultes. Enfin l'efficacité des corrections sur le vif est excessivement limitée, comme nous le savons tous.

Le désir de tout corriger qui semble être la préoccupation majeure d'Hammerly ne peut venir, à mon avis, que d'une conception autocratique de l'éducation, découlant d'une insécurité foncière de l'enseignant. Il est tellement soucieux de limiter le nombre d'erreurs qu'il préfère le silence. En fait il est obsédé par le souci de tout contrôler. Rien ne doit échapper à la vigilance absolue du maître.

Sa conception de la pédagogie est très restrictive, voire terroriste dans la mesure où il n'y a pas place pour des conceptions autres que la sienne.

Il néglige le fait que chacun choisit ce qu'il apprend et quand il l'apprend - au lieu d'absorber ce que dispense le maître, comme semble le croire Hammerly. Il néglige par trop la diversité des styles d'apprentissage.

Si je repense à mon propre développement linguistique, je vois quatre phases:

1. Mutisme total résultant de la méthode grammaire/traduction
2. Fluidité très incorrecte à la suite d'une année aux USA
3. Acquisition de la précision après le passage par l'université
4. Enrichissement idiomatique par contacts avec des locuteurs anglais.

Dans ce cas personnel, la précision est venue après coup, une fois que la fluidité a été acquise - le contraire de ce que dit Hammerly.

Je pense que son propos n'est pas applicable aux étudiants d'université. L'étudiant typique, au terme d'une dizaine d'années d'étude de la langue étrangère a une certaine précision, mais aucune fluidité et il craint toujours de "se lancer". Il ne servirait à rien de faire encore de la grammaire - c'est à peu près la même situation que celle décrite par Brown en Chine. Les étudiants dont il avait la charge connaissaient les règles de grammaire (connaissance déclarative) mais étaient incapables de parler (compétence procédurale). Le remède est identique. La priorité absolue dans ce cas là est de développer sa fluidité, la précision s'améliorera chemin faisant, de trois façons :

- par l'autocorrection,
- grâce aux autres étudiants qui corrigent les fautes
- enfin grâce aux corrections de l'enseignant, *après* une activité.

Mais la priorité absolue dans les classes à l'université, au niveau intermédiaire / avancé est de fournir aux étudiants des occasions de s'exprimer. Ils ne peuvent mettre en oeuvre ce qu'ils connaissent et l'affiner qu'en l'utilisant.

Dans la bibliographie du livre d'Hammerly, j'ai constaté certaines lacunes. Ainsi, Brumfit (1984) n'y figure pas, alors qu'il a plaidé l'alternance d'activités pour développer simultanément fluidité et précision.

Je n'y ai pas trouvé non plus de référence à Rebuffot - il est vrai qu'il écrit en français - qui, dans une étude très bien documentée, se fait le porte-parole des heurs et malheurs de l'immersion au Canada. Son opinion qui se fait l'écho de nombreuses recherches est bien plus nuancée que celle d'Hammerly qui vitupère contre les résultats de recherche faussés par les a priori.

Anne Péchou

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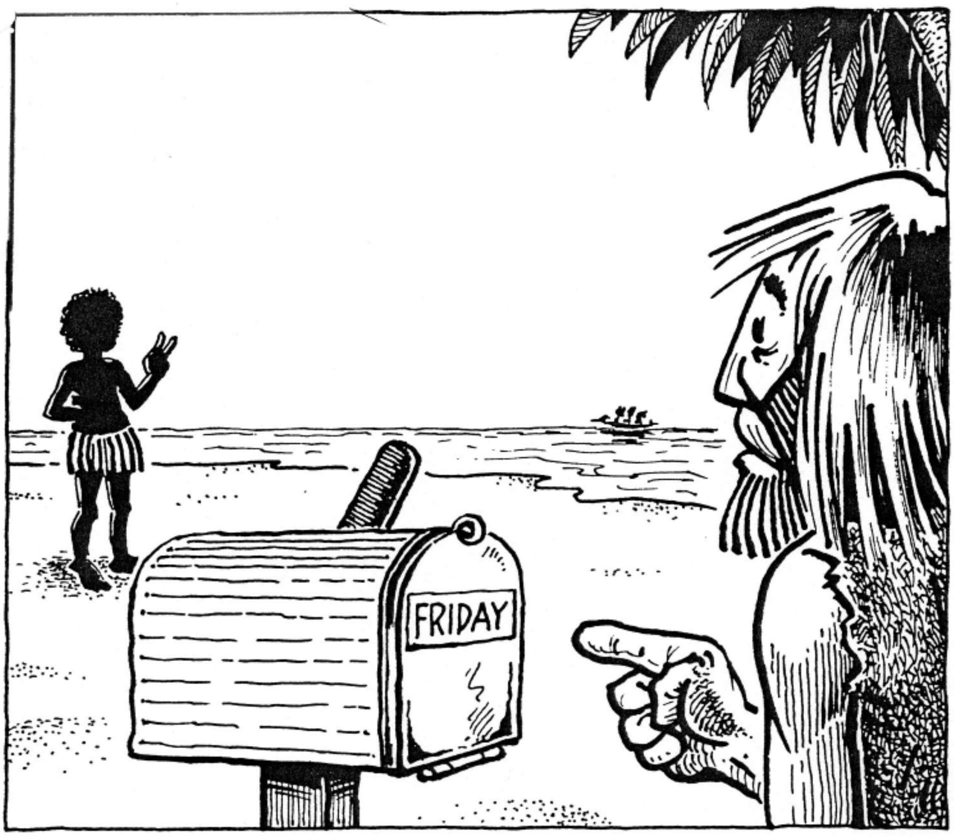
FRIDAY

L'accès au courrier électronique sur Internet donne également accès à des "listes de discussion" sur certains thèmes. Ainsi, le réseau TESL-L s'intéresse aux langues secondes. Cette liste a une sous-liste dont le thème est "fluency". Nous y avons trouvé une bibliographie et un article que nous reproduisons ici pour celles et ceux qui n'ont pas encore accès à Internet.

FLUENCY FIRST

This file is from the archives of the TESL-L Electronic Discussion Forum for teachers of English as a second or foreign language. If you print out or otherwise distribute this file, we would appreciate your leaving this note at the top of it, so that our colleagues can know where it came from and how they can get further files from the archives.

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Fluency First: Reversing the Traditional ESL Sequence

ABSTRACT

The author describes an ESL department's whole-language approach to writing and reading, replacing its traditional grammar-based ESL instructional sequence. The new approach is enabling students to become fluent in writing and reading before having to produce grammatically correct pieces or to comprehend academic material. The research and theory on language acquisition, literacy development and learning support a whole-language approach to ESL. And the quantitative and qualitative results of the several years of using the approach affirm its superiority over former traditional approaches to ESL reading and writing instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Too many English as a Second Language (ESL) students in American colleges do not achieve their educational goals because they do not meet their college's writing standards. Those who evaluate ESL students' writing commonly cite the following problems:

- lack of fluency or control over the language, including inadequate vocabularies;
- general lack of knowledge and the consequent inability to write effective pieces;
- errors in grammar and the mechanics of writing, despite the fact that most ESL students have had years of instruction in both.

One way to address these problems is by reversing the traditional grammar focused approach to ESL and instead using a whole-language approach, in which we help ESL students acquire greater fluency and knowledge and thus write more effective, and even more correct pieces.

Freeman and Freeman suggest that the following whole-language principles are important for second language (L2) learning in classrooms:

- language should be learner-centered;
- language is best learned when kept whole;
- language instruction should employ listening, speaking, reading and writing;
- language in the classroom should be meaningful and functional;
- language is learned through social interaction;
- language is learned when teachers have faith in learners.

This article describes an experimental whole-language approach to ESL writing and reading in an open-admissions urban institution serving primarily minority students, City College of the City University of New York.

BACKGROUND

The ESL students in question typically have great trouble passing the university's required skills assessment tests in writing and reading, tests which students must pass before taking the bulk of their required courses, even the English Composition requirement. Prior to 1988, ESL students' average passing rate on the writing test had been only about thirty-five percent and on the reading test, twenty percent.

The ESL faculty had historically taken a traditional instructional approach, stressing grammar and intensive reading and writing (a lot of work on relatively short readings and on writing paragraphs and essays). Yet pass rates had remained low. Then in the fall of 1987, a group of faculty at the City

College, CUNY, began to use a whole-language approach to literacy. Since then, students' writing and reading test scores have improved dramatically. We started implementing our approach in ESL 10, our first level ESL reading/writing course for students with a basic knowledge of English but weak reading and writing abilities. The ESL 10 students read several books, responded to them in writing in journals and wrote 10,000-word, semester-long projects. We ran the classes workshop-style, with students helping each other revise their own pieces, and understand the books they were reading. We used no ESL textbooks and did not teach grammar in those classes, but students made greater gains than we had ever seen in ESL 10. The approach was so successful that we extended it the following semester into our two upper-level ESL reading/writing courses, ESL 20 and 30 and, since then, our reading and writing test passing rates have doubled, and the ESL course repetition rate has been cut in half.

IMPLICATIONS FROM THEORY AND RESEARCH

First language (L1) acquisition

Implications for a whole-language approach are plentiful in research literature. Educators can learn much about how lasting learning occurs from the research on L1 acquisition, not only because it is language, but because L1 is something which almost everyone learns by the age of four or five, though it is extraordinarily complex. Macaulay summarizes how children learn L1: by being in the midst of abundant talk, by listening and experimenting with speaking, learning names of things, then phrases, and then the syntax they need to express themselves. They progress in L1 acquisition primarily through massive amounts of interaction with parents or more knowledgeable peers and they control their own L1 learning. Their knowledge of vocabulary, syntax and pronunciation expands until they are fluent. The key to L1 acquisition is plentiful interaction with more knowledgeable others. The implication for L2 acquisition in classrooms is to provide similar language input and interaction, but due to time limits, in a far more condensed way.

L2 acquisition

Providing optimal input in the classroom in order to foster the development of L2 fluency does not mean teaching grammar. Krashen (1985) and McLaughlin conclude from the research on L2 acquisition that L2 best develops in ways similar to L1: in contexts where the negotiation of meaning - and not the correctness of form - is the central motivating force and where language exposure is real, extensive and anxiety free. But in most language classrooms, language exposure is artificial (contrived, practised, grammatically sequenced), limited and anxiety- arousing. Krashen (1987) hypothesizes that the best classroom L2 acquisition will occur when the input provided to learners is comprehensible, interesting and/or relevant, not grammatically sequenced, provided in abundant quantity and in such a way to promote self-confidence and self-direction, while arousing little or no anxiety. After examining popular L2 teaching methods and finding most of them wanting in such input, he concludes that pleasure reading and conversation have the greatest potential of meeting all the requirements for optimal L2 acquisition because they are real input, and not the contrived type of input found in ESL textbooks and tapes. A whole-language approach includes much pleasure reading and real conversation.

Krashen also makes an important distinction between L2 learning and L2 acquisition. L2 learning takes effort, like extensive memorization of rules and practice of forms learned. Then when people try to use learned forms in real language situations, they often make mistakes and find it difficult to express themselves adequately and even to understand others. L1 is acquired naturalistically through interaction with others, with far less mental effort and with a greater payoff. L2 may be acquired in the same manner in schools in a whole-language approach. This is true of both children and adults.

McLaughlin explains that the early stages of language development involve the same cognitive strategies for adults and children. The difference is that adults have superior memory heuristics that enable longer retention and more facile discovery of meaning. Adults also have more extensive L1 experience, vocabulary and conceptual knowledge that help them to process information more quickly. And if literate in L1, they have far less work to do in acquiring literacy in L2. They can also learn and apply rules of language more easily, although an overemphasis on correctness can also impede progress in L2 acquisition.

McLaughlin and others who have studied L2 acquisition describe learners' errors in terms of strategies. Thus what seems to be L1 interference or perhaps an inability to master L2 grammar is actually the result of the learner's strategies used to discover irregularities and rules in L2. L2 adults make similar mistakes, regardless of what L1 they speak, and these represent incorrect attempts to discover L2 rules. They make simplification errors, transfer errors or over-generalization errors as they strive to make themselves understood and they make them for as long a time as it takes them to develop their competence in L2. This period of development is referred to as the interlanguage stage and needs to be supported by efforts to help the learner communicate intelligibly in L2 before requiring that s/he be correct. To learn to communicate intelligibly requires a great deal of exposure to L2 with the types of input and interaction L1 learners receive.

L1 literacy development

The research on the most successful learning of reading and writing in L1 also shows that when learners do abundant reading and writing, talk about both, enjoy both, exercise a good deal of control over both and are not overly concerned about correctness, literacy development, like L1 acquisition, is enjoyable, successful and almost effortless. And through an approach such as whole language, learners acquire a good deal of functional language knowledge that otherwise they would have to take great pains to learn: spelling, grammar, vocabulary, appreciation of literature, good composing skills, and good reading skills.

On the elementary school level, Holdaway, Graves, Harste and Smith, among others, have shown how children acquire the skills of literacy when they read and write extensively, talk about language and about what they read and write, have abundant time for independent reading and writing, receive constructive feedback on their writing, ask their own questions, formulate and test their own hypotheses, are not afraid of making mistakes, are encouraged to become serious authors and are immersed in literate activities across the curriculum. They can control and direct many of these activities themselves.

Branscombe, Atwell, Bartholomae and Petrosky and many others on the secondary and post-secondary levels report similar findings. It appears that students who read extensively and talk about their reading, who become fluent writers before having to focus on correctness (Mayher *et al*.) and who are writing to learn (Goswami) become more successful academic readers, writers and learners.

L2 literacy development

As already indicated, research on second language literacy development also points to a whole language approach, with an emphasis on integrative skills rather than grammar study, memorization and repetitious exercises. According to Hudelson, language development researchers have concluded that people learn languages by actively participating in an ongoing process of figuring out how language works and that learners must be in control of this process. Research evidence further suggests that the processes of L1 and L2 acquisition are more similar than different, which in the school setting means that L2 learners are in the process of creative construction of the new language. Errors are a natural part of this process as learners formulate and test hypotheses about the language. There are also significant individual differences in the rate of acquisition, thus a uniformly paced curriculum is of little effectiveness. L2 learners want to use the L2 and work hard to be included in the ongoing activities of the classroom. More knowledgeable others and peers offer important teacher functions in providing comprehensible input and motivation to help L2 learners continue learning English. This is true for both oral and written English (1-3).

Like native speakers, L2 writers creatively construct the written language, develop at their own pace and control the process. Some will experiment and take risks in creating meaning in writing; others will use familiar patterns for a long time. Investigations have shown that given sufficient encouragement and opportunity, ESL writers will work hard to create meaning, even those without native-like control of English (20-21). ESL learners also construct meaning from print as they read, just as L1 readers do (Carrell *et al*.).

There have been several studies conducted and hypotheses made about the processes of L2 writing which are very similar to those regarding L1 writing. For example, Edelsky found that the quality of writing is much higher for unassigned topics than for assigned ones in ESL writing. Others have found that personal involvement with a piece also has a positive effect on its quality. Pieces on unassigned topics tend to be better developed and have a personal voice. This is particularly true when there is a real audience, when writers have a stake in the piece, and when it is purposeful. And Urzua found that in writing/reading workshops, as opposed to traditional instruction, L2 writers revise more, develop a personal voice and become more aware of the power of language. She also found that conferencing influences revising positively.

Hudelson concludes from her review of the research on children's writing that ESL learners, while still learning English, can write. Their texts have many features in common with L1 writers' texts, features indicating that they are making predictions about how the L2 works and testing and revising their ideas. She recommends a variety of strategies for classrooms, including using diaries and journals to promote fluency in writing and utilizing personal narratives and writing workshop techniques to help learners become comfortable with writing on self-selected topics, and with drafting, sharing, and revising. She also suggests incorporating expressive, literary and expository writing into meaningful content-area learning.

Likewise, Krashen (1985) recommends using subject matter in L2 as a vehicle of presentation and explanation, but without demands for premature production or full grammatical accuracy. He cites the evidence from the successful language immersion programs in Canada and elsewhere, where teachers incorporate language development into content-area instruction. And in their studies of adult L2 writing, Raimes, Zamel and others have found that the L2 writing process must begin with abundant opportunities to generate ideas before students focus on editing. They and other researchers in ESL (Krashen 1982; Spolsky) also argue that direct grammar instruction does not generally improve L2 writing or even L2 acquisition. In fact, it probably impedes both processes.

As for L2 reading, Carrell's review of the research shows that L2 reading and L1 reading are currently understood in much the same way: as an active process in which the L2 reader is an active information processor who predicts meaning while sampling only parts of the text. In addition, everything in the reader's prior experience and knowledge plays a significant role in the process of L2 reading (Carrell and Eisterhold). Carrell further explains that L2 reading must involve both the predicting/sampling activities as well as bottom-up processing, or some decoding, to be efficient; thus reading experts now propose an interactive L2 reading model involving both types of processing. And Devine explains that research and experience have shown that reading is a vehicle not only for the development of L2 reading abilities, but for learning L2 as well. Krashen (1989) found that ESL students' vocabulary, writing and spelling improve through extensive reading, another indication that using the language extensively for real purposes helps one to acquire more of the language.

Learning theorists like Vygotsky, Britton, and Wells have stressed the interdependence of language and learning and the fact that lasting learning, intellectual growth and language are inextricably connected. This too suggests classroom learning contexts where learners learn the language and content through an abundance of language-mediated activities and projects over which they can exert considerable control.

THE NEW ESL APPROACH AT CCNY

Borrowing the terms of Mayher *et al.*, that the ideal sequence in the development of writing would stress fluency first, then clarity, then correctness, we made these respectively the goals for our three ESL writing/reading courses: ESL 10, 20 and 30.

ESL 10

We defined fluency as the ability to generate one's ideas in writing intelligibly and with relative ease and to comprehend popular fiction with similar ease. To do this, students were given massive exposure to English. They read 1,000 pages of popular fiction, in books like Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Daphne DuMaurier's *Rebecca*, Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*, Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. They also read autobiographical and biographical works like Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Russell Baker's *Growing Up*, Louis Fischer's *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World* and William Bigson's *The Miracle Worker*. They had to read about 70 pages a week for homework, copy parts that struck them and write responses to those passages in their double-entry journals. They then discussed their responses and questions in small groups in class.

The ESL 10 students worked on a writing project that had to total 10,000 words by semester's end. Most wrote autobiographical pieces consisting of significant chapters or memories in their lives; some wrote family histories. Others wrote of political strife they had lived through and escaped from, or mysteries, love stories, science fiction, or magazines. Each week they drafted a new piece for their "books," as we called them, read them to their partners and got help from them on making the pieces comprehensible, logical, and interesting. Teachers then gave more of the same kind of feedback for students to consider for final revisions.

Although, at the beginning, many students complained about the amount of work required and the lack of grammar lessons, after a few weeks both students and teachers expressed amazement at how much the students had progressed in such a short time. As students got more involved in their reading and in their writing projects, they became more engaged in them, often reading beyond assigned pages and writing up to twice as much as required. By semester's end, most were reading and writing fluently and even more correctly than in the beginning, without having received any corrections or grammar instruction. The overall enthusiasm and trust generated by the approach led us to continue with it in ESL 10 and extend it into the second level, ESL 20.

ESL 20

The goal for ESL 20 became clarity, which we defined as the ability to write expository pieces with a clear focus, sufficient support for that focus, logical development of ideas and introductions and conclusions. In ESL 20, students went from narrative and descriptive writing and reading to expository writing and reading, but not in one leap. We wanted to ease them into expository writing, and from reading for pleasure into academic reading or reading to learn. They began by reading two best-sellers, historical fiction or non-fiction, having to do with the U.S.A., such as John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, William Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner*, *Malcolm X: Autobiography* and Studs Terkel's *Working*. As in ESL 10, they responded in writing in double-entry journals and discussed their readings in small groups.

They also wrote a 10,000-word, semester-long project on some aspect of America having to do with its people, history, culture or problems. The project included letter-writing, point-of-view writing, reading and writing about a best-seller on the topic, interviewing an expert and reporting on that, library research and either a term paper or an action plan to solve some community dilemma. Students revised their pieces in a workshop setting, as in ESL 10. And again, by semester's end, most students were writing clearly enough to pass ESL 20.

ESL 30

Those teaching ESL 30, the course at the end of which students have to pass the university's writing exam, reported and continue to report that the students coming out of ESL 20 are now much better writers and readers than those formerly entering ESL 30. Teachers say they now do not have to focus as much on helping their ESL 30 students to compose well and can concentrate on students' remaining problems with grammar and the mechanics of the language (which are no greater or less than when we used a grammar curriculum) and on getting students ready for the test, which requires them to write a 350-word persuasive piece that is almost error-free in 50 minutes. Thus, the two major goals of ESL 30 are correctness and preparation for the test.

In ESL 30, teachers who use a whole-language approach require that the students revise their pieces first to be sure they are completely clear, intelligible, and well-written before they focus on correcting them. Once they are sure students can write clear and effective persuasive pieces, they have them begin work on eliminating the largest percentage of their errors by choosing just a few of their most serious and most frequently occurring errors and looking just for them when they edit. This eliminates the bulk of students' errors without the cognitive overburden of trying to correct every error.

To become strong in argumentative writing, students read newspaper and magazine articles and editorials, write in their journals in response to them, discuss their ideas in small groups, debate the issues both aloud and in silent written debates with partners and build up a knowledge of current issues and principles involved in them, like civil rights, government policies, domestic and foreign problems, personal values and beliefs and ethics. Students also freewrite frequently and write a few essays each week which go through the same process as in ESL 10 and 20: peer review, revising, teacher response, more revising, until the essay is clear and correct enough to satisfy the criteria posed by the writing exam. In the process, students ask many questions in the context of their writing, and then write what they've learned on individualized study lists of spelling words, new vocabulary, useful facts, grammar points they need to focus on, mechanics issues and style issues.

Some ESL 30 teachers also have students write real letters or editorials to newspapers, public agencies, government officials, businesses and others to complain about an issue and to suggest solutions. We have found that this type of real writing usually produces the most effective pieces.

Evaluation

Students in ESL 10 and 20 are evaluated at the end of the semester with a timed essay exam with topics relevant to the semester-long projects they have done and they books they have read. But this exam is only one factor in their evaluation. They keep a portfolio with their beginning piece from the first day of the semester, their mid-term exam, their final and three pieces from their projects that they think are their best. The ESL 10 and 20 teachers read each others' students' exams and if necessary, pieces from students' portfolios and recommend if the student should pass or repeat the course. Then the teacher bases the grade on the quality of the portfolio pieces, including consideration of the quantity of work completed. ESL 30 students are given the writing exam at the end of the course and two readers other than the teacher, usually one from the ESL staff and one from the English department, evaluate the essays. Students who do not pass the exam must repeat ESL 30.

ESL 10, 20 and 30 classes utilizing the new approach have these commonalties: a workshop format, peer and teacher help with revisions, massive exposure to real language through extensive reading, writing and speaking, absence of ESL textbooks, absence of sequenced grammar syllabi or uniform curricula, student control over much of their work, a portfolio system and teachers helping individuals and small groups rather than leading the whole class. We follow a uniform approach, or philosophy, but it is not a static method. Indeed, we are enabled to offer a curriculum that is anything but static. Materials and activities change with new insights; teachers regularly exchange ideas to help students increase their learning; students learn from their interests and work from their strengths; there is a great deal of life in the classroom, as students share their knowledge and expertise with others; and the approach helps students utilize better learning strategies and become more responsible for their own learning.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

The quantitative results we have so far have reassured us and the students that we are headed in the right direction. The number of students who have taken courses using the fluency-first approach is approximately 10,000 so far. Even though a few ESL teachers have stuck to a traditional curriculum, most have used the new approach, and overall, ESL students' reading scores since 1987 have almost doubled. We believe that this rate could be even higher if the test were given after ESL 30 or even later; currently it is given after ESL 21, a reading course students take concurrently with ESL 20.

When we compared the writing test passing rate from several semesters prior to implementing whole language, with several semesters since, we found that the passing rate rose from thirty-five percent to fifty-six percent, about the same rate for native speakers of English. In the last few years, since we have dispensed with the test at the ESL 30 level, the passing rate for ESL 30 has risen to about seventy-six percent, well over double the rate prior to the new curriculum. And there is a much lower course repetition rate for ESL 10 and 20 than before; it has practically been cut in half. In addition, more students who start on the ESL 10 level are passing the test. But we all know that numbers do not tell the whole story.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

The most compelling evidence of the success of the approach has been qualitative, with uniformly enthusiastic feedback from teachers, almost universally positive feedback from students and concrete evidence of improvement in students' written work and reading abilities. On a survey conducted at the end of the second semester in which the new approach was being piloted, teachers reported unprecedented improvement in students' control of English, with growth in fluency occurring very fast. Students typically doubled their production by the fourth week of class. Teachers also reported greater clarity in the way students presented ideas, more daring in their use of new vocabulary, greater ability to write interesting pieces, better reading comprehension and speed, greater enjoyment of reading than in previous ESL courses and better discussions of readings with students providing insights from their own lives and world views. Many reported that students' essays had more depth and richness, more fluency and better grammar and that all the students progressed more in these courses than in previous ones. Students also showed more growth in the affective domain, specifically more confidence, better ability to work with groups and more tolerance for divergent views. And cognitively, they were better at analytical thinking and showed much greater intellectual curiosity. Further, the students who did the most work progressed the most and students in general were more serious, concentrated, self-reliant, and open to others than in previous semesters when the approach was traditional.

Teachers reported a higher degree of engagement, attention and time on task. Students were more willing to write and less afraid of it. They also did so much reading and discussion that it gave them a shared experience in which everyone seemed to have an equal footing; this was empowering to students who were less skilled in English. And teachers felt that students gained confidence in themselves as writers and saw themselves as serious writers in this approach; traditional approaches seemed to inhibit experimentation and exaggerate the importance of errors. Before the course, students could not apply rules they had learned to their writing; but after it, it seemed they could. Yet the only grammar instruction they had had was in the context of questions about their own writing as they revised it.

When asked what they would change about the approach, teachers said they needed more time for in-class individual conferences, more lab support in the way of tutors, better techniques for getting the groups to be more independent and greater evidence that students are learning grammar and mechanics in ESL 10 and 20, even though they can see fewer mistakes as students progress through the courses. Teachers also wanted to do less talking and interfering with students' discussions and their written pieces, because such intervention appeared to lessen students' involvement and creativity. Many ended up not even looking at students' first or second drafts, but responding to the third draft after the student had worked with a peer. However, at that point, teachers said they wanted to give even more helpful responses than they were giving. And they wanted to work more on a one-to-one basis than they had been able to do.

The majority of students believed that they had improved dramatically because they could write such long pieces and read so much in such a short time, compared with work done in former courses. They felt the organization of their writing had improved and said they had greater confidence and control when writing and that they were surprised by how much they could write. They also felt they were better able to develop ideas and liked working on the semester-long writing projects the best. They expressed pride in having read several real novels in English, rather than ones abridged for ESL students, but they felt less sure about their correctness in writing. Many students also said that the course, although focusing on reading and writing, had improved their speaking as well. And a few also commented that their ways of thinking had changed, that they felt Americanized because of the course work and that they liked that feeling.

Students said they wanted more grammar, even though they acknowledged greater growth in this ESL approach than in previous courses in which grammar had received major stress. They also wanted more practice for the final exam. And many students said that the writing demands of the double-entry journals were too great. They also said they were teaching each other too much and maybe the teacher should be teaching them more. In other words, despite their recognition of and satisfaction with their own growth, years of traditional instruction limited their confidence in the approach.

ONGOING RESEARCH

The City College has received grants from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) to conduct further research on the approach, to train teachers in the theory and techniques used and to disseminate project findings. We want to demonstrate how students' writing improves over time using a whole-language, fluency-first approach, compared with how it develops using a grammar-based approach. And we have many questions to answer, like whether the pressure to pass the test adversely affects students' development in writing in ESL 30, and how well our students do in later required courses. We also want to experiment with students' taking greater control and responsibility in the courses, and with other course themes, activities, projects, and readings.

But what we have already learned is that our students now are acquiring fluency in English along with what Mayher *et al*. call fluency in the written language and that this latter fluency is the basis for their becoming competent readers and writers, enough to become successful members of the academy. Thus there are decided implications for such an approach in teaching native speakers of English as well.

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